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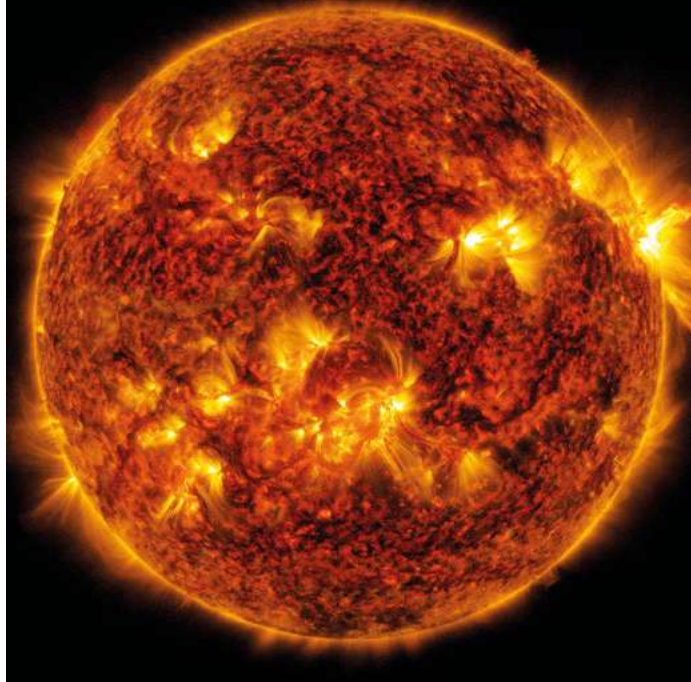


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Mike Smith



CONTENTS



NASA / SDO

36 Sunspots, solar flares and the Carrington Event



PICTORIAL PRESS LTD / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

18 TE Lawrence's ghosts



10 Toads in trees



ETIENNE GILFILLAN

52 The Atlantis Bookshop at 100



FORTEAN TIMES 421

Why fortean?

Everything you always wanted to know about *Fortean Times* but were too paranoid to ask!

SEE PAGE
69

STRANGE DAYS

A digest of the worldwide weird, including: Jubilee UAP, signals from space, Amarillo entity, resurrections and more...

- | | | | |
|----|------------------|----|--------------------|
| 12 | ARCHAEOLOGY | 18 | GHOSTWATCH |
| 13 | CLASSICAL CORNER | 24 | THE CONSPIRASPHERE |
| 14 | SCIENCE | 28 | THE UFO FILES |

FEATURES

30 COVER STORY DRIVEN MAD BY THE GREAT SEA SERPENT

CHARLES PAXTON uncovers the eventful life of a Victorian merchant captain, would-be murderer, cryptozoological monomaniac, evangelist, inventor and hero.

36 A STORM ON THE SUN

DAVID HAMBLING looks at the surprising history of sunspots and solar storms, examines the heated arguments about their nature and influence, and considers the likelihood that the next Carrington Event will have cataclysmic results here on Earth...

42 A WARNING TO THE FORTEAN

ROB GANDY is back on the weirdness beat in Lincolnshire, where he finds that sometimes real-life events can morph into local supernatural folklore...

SERIES

46 STRANGE STATESMEN

Triangles of Terror Trilogy, Side One **SD TUCKER**

69 PECULIAR POSTCARDS

Nita, the Hypnotised and Suspended Lady **JAN BONDESON**

FORUM

51 The Cup, the cortege and the curse **CLAIRE DAVY**

52 Atlantis at 100 **LYNN PICKNETT AND CLIVE PRINCE**

REGULARS

- | | | | | | |
|----|-----------|----|-------------|----|----------------|
| 02 | EDITORIAL | 63 | LETTERS | 71 | PHENOMENOMIX |
| 55 | REVIEWS | 70 | READER INFO | 72 | STRANGE DEATHS |

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FORTEAN TIMES is produced for Diamond Publishing Limited, a member of the Metropolis Group, by WILD TALENTS LTD. Postal address: Fortean Times, PO BOX 1200, Whitstable CT11 9RH.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

STANDARD SUBSCRIPTION RATES

12 issues: UK £50.58; Europe £62; USA £70;
Rest of the world £70

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LICENSING & SYNDICATION

FORTEAN TIMES is available for international licensing and syndication
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DISTRIBUTION

DISTRIBUTED IN UK, IRELAND AND WORLDWIDE

by Marketforce (UK) Ltd, 5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London, E14 5HU. Tel: 02037879101.

Email: hello@marketforce.co.uk

Speciality store distribution by **Worldwide Magazine**
Distribution Ltd, Tel: 0121 788 3112 Fax: 0121 78 12720121 788 3112 Fax: 0121 78 1272

DIAMOND PUBLISHING LTD.

PUBLISHED BY DIAMOND PUBLISHING LIMITED.
A MEMBER OF THE METROPOLIS GROUP.

Fortean Times (ISSN 0308-5899 USPS 023-728) is published 13 times a year by Diamond Publishing Limited, Vantage London, Great West Road, London TW8 9AG, United Kingdom. Periodicals Postage Paid at Brooklyn, NY 11256). **US POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to WORLD CONTAINER INC 150-15, 183rd St, Jamaica, NY 11413, USA.
© Diamond Publishing Limited: JULY 2022



COVER ILLUSTRATION ETIENNE GILFILLAN

THANKS TO MIKE DASH FOR HIS NAUTICAL KNOWLEDGE AND LUCAS MARTINS FOR HIS HELP WITH THE MODELLING

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EDITORIAL



SAUCERS AND SERPENTS

The Queen's Platinum Jubilee has come and gone, leaving the odd bit of weirdness in its wake: what was the small, fast moving object that inexplicably joined the celebratory flypast down the Mall and was caught on at least two different cameras? (p.4) It's a shame Prince Phillip is no longer with us, as he more than likely would have taken a keen interest in this unidentified interloper that many have claimed is a UAP. Phillip, of course, would have called it a UFO: as Jenny Randles notes in her column this issue (p.29), which focuses on the royal family's numerous connections to the UFO mystery, the late Duke of Edinburgh was a secret reader of *Flying Saucer Review* back in the days when Jenny was working on the mag. We can't help but wonder if he ever picked up a copy of FT (in which he made a number of appearance over the years)...

George Drevar – the eccentric subject of this month's cover story – would undoubtedly have been an FT subscriber had we been on the newsstands in 1875, the year he had a notable and widely publicised cryptozoological encounter. En route from Brazil to Zanzibar, Captain Drevar was one of the witnesses to an apparent struggle between a sperm whale and “a monster sea snake”, an experience that changed the course of his life and turned him into a monomaniac on the subject of “the great sea serpent”. We've no doubt from the sheer volume of letters he fired off to newspapers and journals around the world that the letters pages of a 19th century *Fortean Times* would have had Captain Drevar as a regular and passionate correspondent.

SIGNALS AND SUNSPOTS

Meanwhile, serious searchers for alien life – looking further afield than Buckingham Palace – continue to train their radio telescopes heavenward and wait for something like the famous ‘Wow!’ signal of 1977 (the “Wow!” was what astronomer Jerry Ehman, who spotted the anomalous and inexplicably powerful radio signal, wrote on a print-out). Recently, the story broke that China's ‘Sky Eye’ radio telescope had detected narrow band radio signals evidently not of natural origin – but just as the world wondered whether E.T. had made contact, the report was mysteriously deleted. With this in mind, we take a look at the current state of play in the ongoing search for alien signals (p.5-7).

Telescopes of an earlier age were trained relatively closer to home, revealing that our Sun was far from being just a benign golden disc: the discovery of sunspots and solar storms, particularly in the work of 19th century astronomer Richard Carrington, suggested that what happened on the Sun didn't just stay on the Sun, but had all sorts of impacts, some of them potentially devastating, for life on Earth. David Hambling examines the debate such discoveries generated and asks if we're ready for the next, inevitable, Carrington Event (pp.36-41).

ERRATA

FT419:19: Tom Ruffles wrote in to say that while he was pleased to see his photo of SPIDER in Alan Murdie's Ghostwatch column, the cover of *Your Computer* magazine pictured next to it, featuring the late Tony Cornell, was actually published in May 1983, not 1987 as wrongly stated in the caption.

LARGECOW

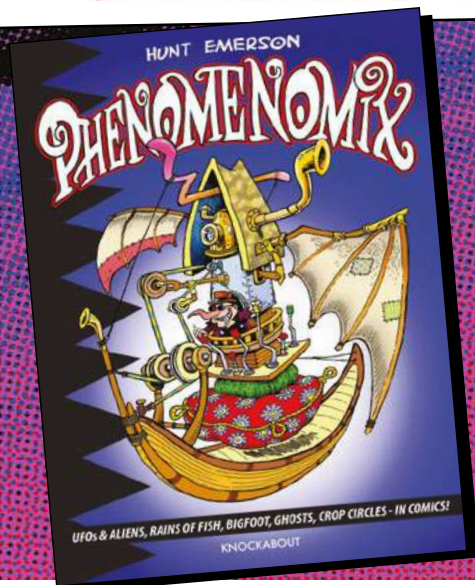
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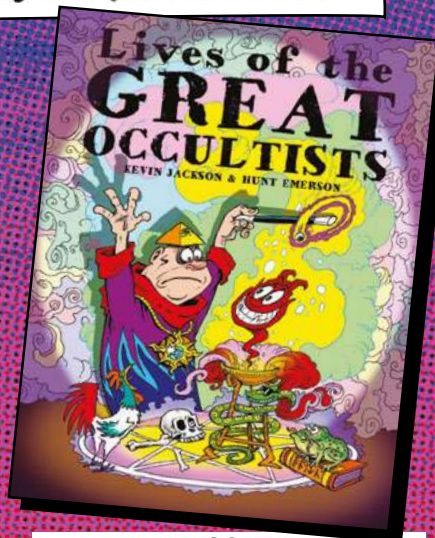
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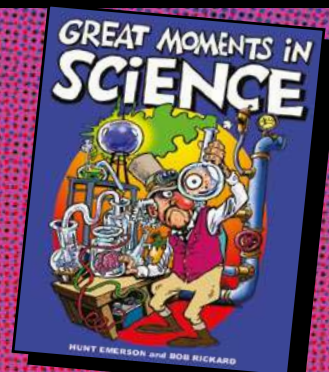
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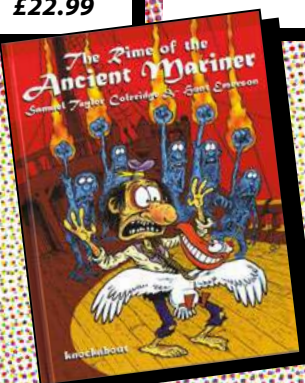
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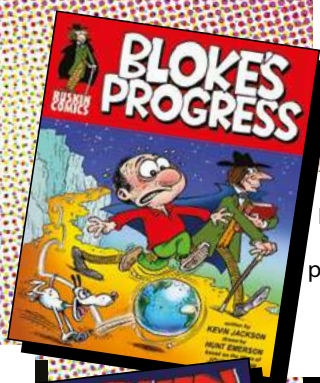
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A DIGEST OF THE WORLDWIDE WEIRD

STRANGE DAYS

IMAGES OF THE UNKNOWN

Mysterious entity spooks zoo while UFO photobombs the Jubilee flypast

AMARILLO ENIGMA

Security cameras at Amarillo Zoo captured an image of a mysterious entity outside their perimeter fence at 1.25am on 21 May, with city officials admitting bafflement and asking the public to help identify it, saying: "Was it a person with a strange hat who likes to walk at night? A large coyote on its hind legs? A Chupacabra? It is a mystery – for Amarillo to help solve." Needless to say, the image went viral. Predictably, many people agreed it was probably a Chupacabra, which, since its debut in 1995, has become the go-to explanation for any vaguely weird entity in the Americas from pretty much anywhere south of Missouri. Others suggested it was someone in a "Furry" suit out for a night walk, while more sober commenters thought it might be a jumping coyote caught at a weird angle, and there were of course many who were certain it was an alien.

The Demogorgon from TV series *Stranger Things*, Marvel's Rocket Raccoon, and the infamous horned hat-wearing "Qanon Shaman" from the 6 January attack on the US Capitol (see FT402:4) have also been suggested. It seems that the zoo has very primitive security cameras, reliant on taking a still image every second or so, not continuous video, and the images taken either side of this one, which might give some context, have not been released. Because of slow shutter speeds on this kind of camera, there is potential for blurring and distortion



if something is moving fast, and it looks possible that it was actually shooting in the infrared spectrum. This makes anything radiating heat, such as a human or animal body,

TOP: The bizarre-looking figure filmed lurking outside Amarillo Zoo. ABOVE AND LEFT: Two views of the small silvery object filmed taking an unscripted role in the Queen's Platinum Jubilee flypast.

show up as an undifferentiated white shape, which means all the detail is blurred out, further complicating identification. As a result, it is almost certain that no definitive identification will ever be made, and it still remains a possibility that the whole thing was a social media stunt to promote Amarillo Zoo. *chron.com*, 9 Jun 2022; *today.com*, 10 Jun 2022.

JUBILEE UAP

During the Queen's Platinum Jubilee fly-past over London, several viewers claimed to have spotted a UAP gatecrashing the Red Arrows' performance. They pointed out what they thought was a small fast-moving object crossing the plume of coloured smoke emitted by the jets. While some media dismissed the object as dust on the camera, the object, described as shiny on top and dark below, was caught from at least two different angles, by Sky News and BigJet TV, which makes that an unlikely solution.

Social media commenters swiftly went online to share their opinions, saying, "It goes across the screen in a second," and "this goes WAY too fast to be a drone or balloon in the wind", but this view was not universally accepted. Others took a more analytical approach saying, "Helicopter filming is flying to the right. Almost static balloon is smaller and a lot closer to the camera than the jets in the background, giving the effect it's travelling super-fast," and "You can see the balloon shape as it bobs side to side, exactly as you'd expect a balloon that's several hundred feet off the ground to do. Also, there's hundreds if not thousands of people with balloons on the ground here..."

Some saw it as a significant alien intrusion. One poster said: "That seems like a warning to me. More than 70 military aircraft flew during the celebration. They're buzzing their acrobatic jets." Another added: "Disclosure now, they're giving the signal, it's time."

Of course, even if the object was a UAP, there is nothing to suggest it was of extraterrestrial origin. *ladbible*, 4 Jun; *D.Star.com*, 6 Jun 2022.



OLIGARCHS CARK IT

American tradition rocked by scandals

PAGE 8



BALLS FROM HEAVEN

More falls of mystery metal objects

PAGE 11



SAUCERS OF THE DAMNED

UAPs up for discussion in US Congress

PAGE 28

E.T. PHONE CHINA?

Scientists claim to have detected alien signals in a since-deleted report



ABOVE: The Five-hundred-metre Aperture Spherical Radio Telescope (FAST), also known as China's 'Sky Eye'.

In mid-June China's state-backed *Science and Technology Daily* published a report citing Zhang Tongjie, chief scientist of a SETI team co-founded by Beijing Normal University, the National Astronomical Observatory of the Chinese Academy of Sciences and the University of California, Berkeley, that suggested China's Sky Eye radio telescope had detected alien signals.

The report quoted Tongjie as saying that his team had found two sets of potentially alien signals in 2020 while processing data from 2019, and a further signal in 2022 from observations of planets orbiting other stars. All were narrow-band radio signals, which suggests they are not of natural origin, as natural signals tend to be equally spread across the wavebands. Narrow-band radio waves are used extensively on Earth by aircraft and satellites,

The report vanished with no reason given for its deletion

so the team stressed that their findings are preliminary and need further investigation.

"These are several narrow-band electromagnetic signals different from the past, and the team is currently working on further investigation," Tongjie said. "The possibility that the suspicious signal is some kind of radio interference is also very high, and it needs to be further confirmed and ruled out. This may be a long process." The report said the team will be making repeat observations

to see if they can detect the signals again, obtain as much information about them as possible, and try to conclusively rule out Earthly interference. "We look forward to... being the first to discover and confirm the existence of extraterrestrial civilisations," Tongjie said.

As soon as the piece was published, it started to spread extensively on social media, particularly the Chinese network Weibo, but then it abruptly disappeared from the *Science and Technology Daily* website, with no reason given for its deletion, and media requests for clarification have gone unanswered. *bloomberg.com*, 15 Jun; *livescience.com*, *Space.com*, 16 Jun 2022.

For a round-up of other recent signals from space, turn to p.6.

EXTRA! EXTRA!



FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

HOW THE LIVERPOOL UNDERWORLD TURNED ON 'ALVIN THE CHIPMONK'.

Liverpool Echo, 20 April 2022.

America has a thing for hippo parts

FiveThirtyEight.com, 2 May 2022

NEW HEAD FOR PRINCE ALFRED

Adelaide Advertiser, 16 Dec 2021.

Derby man freezes dead owl in row with property developer

Derby Telegraph, 12 May 2022.

CURRY MAY BOOST SHARKS FOR SHOWDOWN WITH TIGERS

D. Express, 24 Jan 2022.

'Vampire kangaroo' takes stake in national grid

Metro, 29 Mar 2022.



SIDELINES

SECRET CROC

Rumours of a crocodile hidden under the floor of Gynradd Gymraeg Bodringallt School in Ystrad, Wales, passed down through generations, turned out to be true when workmen discovered its remains in 2019. The legend described a local who served in World War I bringing back the body of the saltwater crocodile as a souvenir for the school where it was supposed to have been on display for a time, but was hidden during WWII, after which it was largely forgotten about. Now, after conservation, it has been returned to display in the school. walesonline.co.uk, 14 Jan 2022.

BADGER CRIME

Police in Dudley, West Midlands, were seeking an arsonist who had killed a badger and set fire to its body. They had then dressed the animal's charred remains in a Babygro and suspended it from a nearby post and burned the shape of a heart into the ground at its base. expressandstar.com, 26 Feb 2022.

LOTTERY LOSER

Student Rossi Carmina's excitement at winning £14million on the Euromillions lottery after his numbers came up was short-lived when he realised that his ticket was for the 7 January draw, not the 3 January one he thought he'd bought it for. "It's hard not to think about," he said. "I'd have been set for life." *D.Star*, 7 Jan 2022.

CLIMBER CAT

When Cyril and Erik Rohrer hiked up the 10,000ft (3048m) Mount Britsen in Switzerland, they were followed all the way to the top by a cat. They eventually met the animal group of hikers and sent the animal down with them. They later discovered that it was at least the third time the cat had followed climbers to the peak. "Animals do weird things – they're tougher than us," said Cyril. *Metro*, 20 April 2021.



MARTIN ROSS

SEARCHING FOR E.T. | Signals from space and messages from Earth to aliens

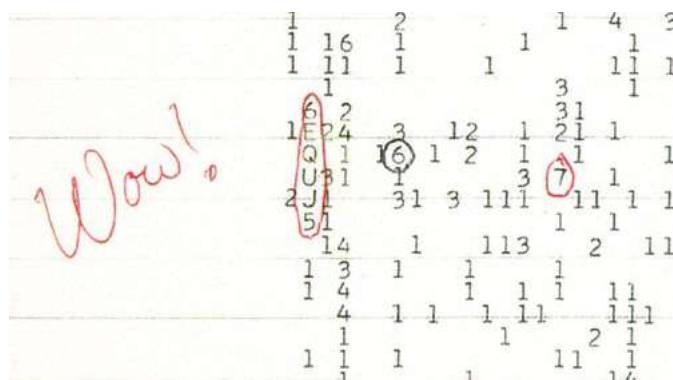


DAVID BROAD

ABOVE: The Arecibo radio telescope in Puroto Rico before its 2020 collapse. BELOW: The data printout of the radio signal that wowed astronomer Jerry Ehman on 15 August 1977. FAING PAGE: A fire lookout tower against the stars at Palomar Observatory.

WOW! SOURCE?

Most signals from space suspected to be of alien origin have turned out to have a natural source, but one signal has refused to go away. This is what is known as the "Wow!" signal, picked up by the Ohio State University's Big Ear telescope on the night of 15 August 1977 during a search for extraterrestrial intelligence (SETI) session. It was a brief blast of radio signal so powerful that Jerry Ehman, the astronomer who spotted it on the data printout, ringed it and wrote "Wow!" beside it (see David Hambling, "Is there anybody out there?", *FT*356:14). The signal was in the electromagnetic frequency band of 1420.4056 MHz, which is produced by the element hydrogen, and Ehman said "Since hydrogen is the most abundant element in the Universe, there is good logic in guessing that an intelligent civilisation within our Milky Way galaxy desirous of attracting attention to itself might broadcast a strong narrowband beacon signal at or near the frequency of the neutral hydrogen line." To be accepted as a signal from an alien civilisation, though, the signal must repeat – and "Wow!" never did. This means that while it is still considered the best candidate for an alien signal, it has never actually been confirmed as one – but nothing even remotely like it has been picked up since, despite astronomers repeatedly



Monkeys killed at least 250 dogs in a sustained revenge campaign

scanning the same area of the sky. Now, though, we do have a potential source for the signal. Astronomer Alberto Caballero has searched through a catalogue of stars from the European Space Agency's Gaia satellite to see if there were any candidates. "I found specifically one Sun-like star," he said. This was an object designated 2MASS 19281982-2640123, about 1,800 light-years away, that has a temperature, diameter and luminosity almost identical to our Sun. While no planets have so far been detected in the vicinity of this star, it is of a type that could have Earth-like worlds orbiting it, hospitable to

a civilisation similar to our own that might have decided to send out a signal. As for the one-off nature of the signal, Caballero points out that whenever humans have attempted to communicate with other potential civilisations, we, too, have sent out single broadcasts, not repeating ones, such as the message sent toward the globular star cluster M13 in 1974 from the Arecibo radio telescope. *livescience.com*, 19 May 2022.

SHOULD WE MESSAGE ET?

The Arecibo radio telescope collapsed in 2020, since when we have not had the means to transmit a message to the stars, but Jonathan Jiang, an astrophysicist at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, and his team have been preparing a signal to send once we have the capacity to do so again. "We want to send a message in a bottle in the cosmic ocean, to say, 'Hey,



we are here,' he says, and hopes to time the transmission for the 50th anniversary of our last signal, the 1974 Arecibo message. He has announced the message plans in advance to open up a discussion as to whether we should send one at all; but as we are already radiating a bubble of signals from TV, radio and other technologies into space, which could one day be detected by aliens, Stuart Taylor, a member of Jiang's team, thinks "it would probably be better, since they're going to listen to us anyway, to send a positive message." The message would be sent toward a ring of stars about 13,000 light years from the centre of the Milky Way, as this region is thought to contain several planets in the habitable zones of their stars. "If there are aliens, they are most likely to be there," Jiang says. His message encodes information in binary describing basic maths, physics and biology, including descriptions of DNA, amino acids and glucose. It would also contain a map of the Milky Way, the Solar System and Earth itself, including information about the makeup of the planet and its atmosphere. It will also have a timestamp telling aliens when it was sent, using a universal measure of time based on the behaviour of hydrogen atoms. Jiang and his team are hoping that either the 500-metre Aperture Spherical Radio Telescope in Guizhou, China, or the Allen Telescope Array in northern California, which was designed to search for extraterrestrial signals, will have been upgraded to send signals by 2024, but they are not holding their breath for a reply. Their message will take 13,000 years to reach its target, and even the Arecibo message from 1974 has by now only travelled 0.2% of the journey to its target stars. *livescience.com*, 6 Apr 2022.

WHY AREN'T THEY HERE?

The Fermi Paradox, named after the Nobel Prize-winning physicist Enrico Fermi, who first raised this contradiction, considers on one hand the vast age and scope of the Universe, which suggests that evidence of alien civilisations should be everywhere, and on the other the fact that this evidence seems to be completely lacking, and asks the question,

"So where is everybody?" Now, astrobiologists Michael Wong, of the Carnegie Institution for Science, and Stuart Bartlett, of the California Institute of Technology, have come up with a potential answer. Extrapolating from the way cities grow, they concluded: "Civilisations either collapse from burnout or redirect themselves to prioritising homeostasis, a state where cosmic expansion is no longer a goal, making them difficult to detect remotely." They found cities have historically grown exponentially until they hit crisis points that cause them to experience rapid crashes in growth. Eventually, the crisis points come faster than innovation can deal with them and cities either collapse or undergo a "homeostatic awakening". Considering civilisations to be like planet-wide cities, Wong and Bartlett see the civilisations that survive as dealing with these crises by redirecting their production away from exponential growth to sustainable development and harmony with the environment. This would result in a stagnant and insular civilisation that would be difficult to detect remotely: "Either outcome – homeostatic awakening or civilisation collapse – would be consistent with the observed absence of civilisations." They suggest that while these civilisations might still explore space, they wouldn't do so on a scale that makes contacting Earth likely. The only time we might detect them would be when they are close to collapse, as they would be dissipating large amounts of energy in a "wildly unsustainable" way. "This presents the possibility that a good many of humanity's initial detections of extraterrestrial life may be of the intelligent, though not yet wise, kind," they add. *livescience.com*, 11 May 2022.

OR MAYBE THEY ARE?

Beatriz Villarroel, a postdoctoral researcher at the Nordic Institute for Theoretical Physics, found something intriguing while working on a project called

"Vanishing and Appearing Sources during a Century of Observations". This involved going over photos from before we could put spacecraft in orbit to look for astronomical phenomena that flare up briefly, then disappear. This is almost impossible today because of the ever-increasing number of satellites and bits of space debris orbiting the Earth, all of which produce brief flashes of light that could be mistaken for transients. Villarroel was working on plates from the Palomar Observatory Sky Survey, which ran from 1949 to 1958, when she found something weird: nine dots of light, all in a line, appearing in just one plate from 12 April 1950. "We found one image where nine stars were out there, and they vanished. And they are not there half an hour earlier, and they are not there six days later." It is possible these are just faults in the photographic emulsion or scanning artefacts, but Villarroel is taking the possibility that they might be extraterrestrial objects seriously. In a paper published in 2021 Villarroel tried to find a more ordinary explanation for them. They ruled out astrophysical explanations, passing airplanes, asteroids and other known light sources as well as contamination caused by nuclear fallout, as no known tests happened in 1950. They have also published a subsequent paper detailing



other instances of transient flashes of light that seem to line up. They are, however, wary of concluding that the images show alien technology.

"We are very careful when we write our papers, because we are not sure if they are real or not," says Villarroel. "We need to always assume that it is the most boring explanation." In the past, potential alien signals have turned out to be the product of a faulty microwave in the astronomer's staff room, while a whole new class of stars, "potassium flare stars", were eventually found to be an artefact caused by light from matches used by researchers taking a fag break outside. *inverse.com*, 21 May 2022.

SIDELINES

SLOTH!

A boy riding a zip wire in La Fortuna, Costa Rica, found a sloth hanging from the cable mid-way down. Calling out to his parents "It's a sloth!" he managed to slow down enough to avoid injuring the creature, but had to complete his ride at sloth pace as the animal ambled down the wire in front of him, taking 15 minutes to complete a trip that should have taken seconds. *boingboing.net*, 16 Mar 2022.

DUCK!

Paul Elcombe, 27 was found guilty of assault after being captured on CCTV attacking Kyle Towers outside a café in Plymouth, Devon, by throwing a live seagull at his head. He denied wounding with intent and injuring a wild bird. *D.Mirror*, 19 Feb 2022.

SPUD SURPRISE

When Katherine Allen opened a pack of sea salt and balsamic vinegar Kettle Chips, she was surprised to find very few crisps and one complete potato. "I did take a bite out of it, but it wasn't very nice. It was quite crispy on the outside [but] it was quite soggy inside. If it were crunchier, it would have been great." Kettle Chips apologised, saying that "very occasionally small potatoes get through the slicing process without being cut". *Sun*, 10 Feb 2022.

FLYING HIT AND RUN

A man walking along the cliffs at Filey Brigg, North Yorkshire, was struck in the face by a passing paraglider, which broke his nose. The pilot, described as a white male in his 40s, wearing a green helmet and dark clothes, landed briefly, then took off again, leaving his victim stunned and bemused. *BBC News*, 28 Mar 2022.

WOMAN BITES WOMAN

A 27-year-old woman out walking her dog in the state of Thuringia, Germany, came to blows with another woman, 57, also walking her dog, after she objected to her hitting it. This resulted in the older woman being knocked to the ground. She retaliated by sinking her teeth into her assailant's calf, while the two dogs sat by, affably watching the fisticuffs. *<i>*, 28 Dec 2021.



SIDELINES...

MEAT RAMPAGE

Villagers in Credenhill, near Hereford, were subjected to a bizarre series of meat attacks in early April. Police reported that one car had lamb chops rammed up its exhaust pipe, while another was found with a chicken leg hanging from a wheel rim. Two houses had meat and eggs thrown at them as well. *BBC News, 11 Apr 2022.*

MIRACLE CLOCK

When estimates for fixing the stopped clock on Grimsby Minster topped £50,000, churchwardens were resigned to it staying stopped. However, 18 months after it ground to a halt, it started working again, seemingly of its own accord, telling the correct time. Churchwarden Chris Daniel called it “a miracle”, particularly as there is only one key for the clocktower and it had not been given to anyone for some weeks prior to the horological resurrection. *D.Express, 24 Feb 2022.*

FLORIDA CHILDREN

A fight between children in the Sky Zone trampoline park in Tampa, Florida, swiftly escalated until more than 200 were involved in a mass brawl that spilled out of the building and into the car park. Police were called and quelled the mini riot, but no arrests were made. *Metro, 8 Dec 2021.*

NAZI SANTA

Police in Zwickau, Germany, arrested a man they describe as “Nazi Santa”. The 39-year-old had set up a workshop manufacturing swastika tree decorations, calendars and busts of Nazi leaders. Any display or manufacture of Nazi insignia is illegal in Germany. *Metro, 13 Dec 2021.*



MARTIN ROSS

OLIGARCHS CARK IT | A spate of bizarre deaths hits Russian businessmen

When Russian oligarch Alexander Subbotin was found dead in early May, it was just the latest in a series of suspicious deaths among the Russian elite that have occurred since January. Subbotin, the former senior manager of the energy company Lukoil, was found dead at the home of “shamans” in Mytishchi, a city northeast of Moscow, in a basement room allegedly used for “Jamaican voodoo rituals”, where he had apparently had a heart attack. According to the official report in the Russian media outlet TASS, Subbotin had arrived at the home of Magua Flores (real name Alexey Pindyurin) and Tina Cordoba (real name Kristina Teikhrib) the day before his death “in a state of severe alcoholic and drug intoxication” seeking a hangover cure that the mystics apparently offered, one component of which was allegedly toad venom, and was found dead by the pair some hours after taking it. Prior to Subbotin’s demise there had been a run of unexpected oligarch suicides too.

- On 19 May, police in Spain found Sergey Protosenya, former top manager of Novatek, another major Russian energy company, dead in a rented villa in Lloret de Mar, Spain. He had apparently hanged himself in the garden and beside him were found an axe and a knife with which his wife and daughter had been killed in the villa. Police were considering two possible scenarios: murder/suicide, or murder by an unknown third party, staged to appear to be a murder/suicide. Protosenya’s son Feodor rejected the murder/suicide theory, telling MailOnline that his father “is not a killer”.

- The day before, in Moscow, another oligarch from an energy-related company, Vladislav Avaev, former vice-president of Gazprombank, was found dead, again along with his wife and daughter, in their luxurious apartment on



ABOVE: The shamanic couple whom Alexander Subbotin (pictured below) is alleged to have visited for a hangover cure before his sudden death in early May.

One component of the hangover cure was allegedly toad venom

Universitetsky Prospekt. He was found with a pistol in his hand and appeared to have shot his family before turning the gun on himself. The door was locked from the inside and Moscow police said there was no evidence of anyone else’s involvement.

- Russian billionaire Vasily Melnikov also apparently decided to kill his family and himself and stabbed his wife and his sons to death in Nizhny Novgorod on 24 March before committing suicide. He was a



senior executive of the medical firm MedStom and was believed to have gone on his killing spree over huge losses his company was experiencing due to Western sanctions in response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Relatives and friends, though, said this was completely out of character and suggested the deaths may have been the result of a violent confrontation with a former business partner. The police, however, reported no traces of a struggle or external interference.

- On 28 February, Ukraine-born Russian oligarch Mikhail Watford (originally named Tolstosheya) was found dead at his home in Surrey. Watford, 66, another former energy company magnate, was found hanging in his garage by a gardener, and police again said there were no suspicious circumstances.

- This was just a few days after the death of Alexander Tyulyakov, 61, Gazprom’s Deputy General Director of the Unified Settlement Center (UCC) for Corporate Security, also found hanging in a garage, this time in his cottage near St Petersburg. He apparently left a suicide note, although after police forensics had started

SIPA US / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO



ABOVE: Three of the current crop of oligarchs found dead in suspicious circumstances (left-right): Sergey Protosenya (killed family, hanged self); Vasily Melnikov (shot family and self); Mikhail Watford (hanged self).

work Gazprom's security service staff allegedly arrived and cordoned off the crime scene, leaving police officers outside the house.

- In January, Leonid Shulman, 60, Gazprom's head of transport, was found dead in the bathroom of his cottage near Leningrad while on sick leave with a broken leg, also with a suicide note beside him. This said that he did not want to be a "disabled person" or a "burden" to his family and complained about unbearable pain in his broken limb, according to Russian media outlets *Gazeta* and *78.ru*. There are suspicions about the genuineness of the letter, as Shulman would have been easily able to afford the best medical care and effective painkillers.

- In addition to this litany of suspicious demises, former Chelsea Football Club owner and prominent Russian oligarch Roman Abramovich suffered symptoms of poisoning while acting as a mediator in peace talks between Russia and Ukraine on 3 March, along with two Ukrainian negotiators. The investigative journalism group Bellingcat said Mr Abramovich and the negotiators suffered symptoms "consistent with poisoning with chemical weapons" including "eye and skin inflammation and piercing pain in the eyes", although all recovered without lasting harm.

What the seven dead oligarchs seemed to have in common was that they didn't publicly oppose Russia's President Vladimir

Putin or the war in Ukraine and hadn't received direct Western sanctions that were imposed on many Russian oligarchs, which makes it unclear why the Kremlin would want them dead. However, author John O'Neill said that he believed that Russia's Unit 29155, part of Russia's military intelligence agency, the GRU, are behind the staged murder-suicides and poisonings, with Putin trying to send a message to people; meanwhile, Anders Aslund, author of *Russia's Crony Capitalism*, told the *New York Post* that the deaths of these oligarchs "looks like Kremlin murders to me". There have also been earlier highly suspicious deaths of oligarchs, such as the "suicide" of one-time Putin svengali Boris Berezovsky in Berkshire and that of Russian whistle-blower, Alexander Perepilichnyy, who

collapsed and died while jogging near his Surrey home in 2012. He was deemed to have died from natural causes, although tests on his body discovered a toxin from the Chinese flowering plant gelsemium in his stomach: its leaves are known to trigger cardiac arrest if ingested. Certainly, Russia seems to have form when it comes to imaginative ways of killing people, with the notorious attack on Sergei Skripal with a nerve agent in Salisbury and the murder of Alexander Litvinenko with radioactive polonium in London being laid at the Kremlin's door, although the Russian government has, somewhat unconvincingly, always denied responsibility for either. *newsweek.com*, 22 Apr; 9 May; *BBC News*, 28 Mar; *Insider*, 12 May; *mirror.co.uk*, 5+9 May; *metro.co.uk*, 16 May 2022.

VOTE BUS STOP

When the Conservative Party held a confidence vote on the leadership of Boris Johnson, the outcome was 148 against, 211 for – coincidentally, the numbers of the two buses that stop outside the Houses of Parliament. The vote also took place on 6 June at 6pm (6pm on 6/6); make of that what you will. *inews.co.uk*, 6 Jun; *itv.com*, 7 Jun 2022.



SIDELINES...

THE QUEEN IS DEAD (AGAIN)

Online gossip site *Hollywood Unlocked* surprised readers with its announcement that "sources close to the Royal Kingdom (sic) notified us exclusively that Queen Elizabeth has passed away. She was scheduled to attend the wedding of British *Vogue* editor Edward Enninfu, but was found dead." It turned out that they had misinterpreted the announcement of the death of rock star Mark Lanegan, former singer of Queens of the Stone Age. *D.Mail*, 26 Feb 2022.

INSTANT TRILLIONAIRE

When he received his compensation cheque from Northern Power Grid after he suffered a power cut during Storm Arwen, Gareth Hughes, 44, of Hebden Bridge, West Yorkshire, was slightly taken aback by the amount. The cheque was for £2,324,252,090,110, slightly more than the Gross Domestic Product of the whole of Britain in 2021. Northern Power Grid blamed a clerical error. *Times*, 14 Feb 2022.

GOOGLE JUSTICE

After 20 years on the run, a Sicilian Mafia killer was arrested after police spotted him on Google Street View, chatting outside a grocer's in Galapagar, a small town in Spain. "How did you manage to find me?" Gioacchino Gammino, 60, asked arresting officers. "I haven't telephoned my family in 10 years." *Times*, 6 Jan 2022.

PARROT EXPLOSION

When a man called the Detroit Animal Welfare Group to say he had some parakeets to drop off, he told them to expect around 60 to 80. When he turned up, he had more than 500 in his truck. Apparently, the man's father had wanted to breed just a few of them, but it got out of control. *D.Mirror*, 8 Jan 2022.

OSTRICH SURPRISE

A 50-year-old man got an unwelcome surprise after sneaking into a property near Yancheng in China to fish in the owner's pond. The land was guarded by an ostrich that repeatedly attacked him while he attempted to fend it off with a pole, eventually managing to make his escape. Ostriches are very short tempered and have a record of kicking people to death. *Metro*, 7 Dec 2021.



SIDELINES...

FAKE NUN

Rachel Mulcahy was banned by a court from going within 150 yards of Clonard Monastery in Belfast after she continually interrupted services there. "She was showing up at services dressed in a brown habit, even though she is not a nun ... throwing her arms in the air, making all sorts of wild claims about God, and then writhing about on the altar," a spokesperson said. Mulcahy also caused disruption outside the GPO in Dublin by dancing frantically to religious music and repeatedly falling to her knees shouting "Christ, come into me". *belfasttelegraph.co.uk*, 3 Apr 2022.

STAIRS MISSING

Attempting to leave her apartment in Milledgeville, Georgia, in late December Olivia Crump was startled to find a crucial part of the building had gone missing: the stairs. "It was impossible to get down without climbing over the ledge with a ladder or scaling the side with a decent drop below," she said. The building's management had failed to inform her that the stairs were being removed as part of renovations, and she and her dog were left stuck in her apartment for four hours before they provided her with a way down. *D.Mail*, 29 Dec 2021.

PERIL IN VENICE

Hoteliers in Venice are now arming their guests with orange water pistols in an effort to drive off the city's rapacious seagulls, who mob outdoor diners and try to steal anything they think is food. "They really work. They're also coloured orange, which those birds don't like," said Paolo Lorenzoni, director of the Gritti Hotel near the Grand Canal. The birds have learned quickly. "As soon as they see the pistols, they fly away," he said. "You don't even need to use them, you just need to keep them on the table." *[UPI]* 22 Mar 2022.



AMPHIBIAN NEWS

Some tree climbing toads and wildly indiscriminate frogs



JUAN DÍAZ RICAURTE

ABOVE: A yellow cururu toad getting amorous with Juan Díaz Ricaurte's boot. **BELOW:** The common toad is not usually thought of as an arboreal species, but new research collects more than 50 reports of them taking to the trees.

TOADS IN TREES

While there have been occasional stories of toads entombed in trees, such as an 1876 report from South Africa of 63 small toads found in the middle of a 16-foot-wide (5m) tree trunk, toads have never been considered arboreal, particularly as their anatomy seems very poorly adapted to climbing. However, evidence from citizen science projects has caused biologists to revise their ideas.

After a volunteer on a dormouse monitoring scheme found a toad in a nesting box set up for the rodents more than a metre (3.25ft) off the ground in a tree, coordinator Silviu Petrovan, at the University of Cambridge, looked for published reports of tree-climbing toads. He drew a blank, so asked other scheme volunteers if they had found anything similar; to his surprise, quite a few had. As a result, he widened his investigation and checked records of the occupants of tree hollows collected by another initiative called the Bat Tree Habitat Key project. "It's quite extraordinary," he said. "The people who do surveying for bats were like, 'Oh yeah, we do find toads from time to time'. But nobody working with toads knows this."

In all, Petrovan tracked



down more than 50 reports of toads in trees found in the two surveys, mostly the common toad (*Bufo bufo*). The highest a toad was found to have climbed was 2.8m (9ft), but Petrovan points out that they may climb higher; the surveys from which he got his data only look at the lower parts of trees that people can easily reach. *New Scientist*, 13 Mar 2022.

FROGGY WENT A COURTIN'

Filipe Serrano, Juan Díaz Ricaurte and colleagues from the University of São Paulo in Brazil have published a paper in the journal *Ecology* entitled "Finding Love in a Hopeless Place: A Global Database of Misdirected Amplexus in Anurans", which *New Scientist* handily summed up as "a spreadsheet of all the instances recorded in the scientific literature... of frogs

attempting to mate with things they shouldn't". It tabulates the encounters by hour, month, year and geographic location. Serrano says: "We recorded a total of 282 interspecific amplexus, 46 necrophiliac amplexus and 50 amplexus with objects or non-amphibian species".

The study was prompted by an experience Serrano had while out hiking, when a male yellow cururu toad insistently attempted to mate with his colleague Ricaurte's boot, despite being repeatedly removed. As well as hiking boots, the paper records frogs attempting to mate with coconuts, mangos, and apples; geckos, turtles, fish, and slugs; balls, rulers, and plastic cups; and even cow and yak dung. The US and Brazil turned out to be the countries with the largest number of reports.

Serrano and colleagues are concerned that these misdirected matings are a sign that habitat disruption is causing problems for amphibians; but as none of the incidents was part of a systematic study and were recorded by happenstance, says Karin Pfennig, a frog biologist at the University of North Carolina, "there's a lot of potential for bias with that." *New Scientist*, 14 May; *theatlantic.com*, 17 May 2022.



FALLING FROM THE SKY

Mystery metal chunks, Chinese space junk and unidentified falling objects caught on camera

GYMPIE CLOSE SHAVE

Tenika Lawther and her partner Matthew Gardner were eating ice cream with their five-month-old daughter Oceana in their kitchen in Gympie, Australia, when they heard a loud bang. "There was smoke and debris everywhere," Lawther said. "We both just looked at each other and right above [Gardner's] head and my daughter's head was this hole in our roof." They found that a 3cm (1in) chunk of silvery metal had smashed through their roof and hit their couch. If it had arrived moments earlier it is likely Oceana would have been killed, as it struck where her bouncer had been standing. "It was very scary," Lawther said. "If my daughter was sitting in her bouncer she would be dead... So it went through the tin on the roof – there's a complete hole, and then a hole straight through our gyprock and then tiles, so two holes and the tiles are smashed." They called the police, who told them it was not a police matter, and have been trying to identify the mystery object ever since. "We definitely don't think a bullet; we've ruled that out," she said. "We think it may have come from an aeroplane or a helicopter; if it came through the roof smashing at that speed it needed to come from a height. We're not sure if it was space junk, because it's sharp, and it looks like it's come off something... We'd love to know if someone's responsible and who's gonna pay for it because now, obviously, we need to go through our home insurance and fix all of this." *abc.net.au*, 5 May 2022.

GUJARAT SPHERES

Previously (FT420:5) we reported a good deal of confusion occurring in Maharashtra, India, in early April as a result of sightings of flying "light bulbs" accompanied by the fall of a metal ring and a metal sphere. Now, in the neighbouring state of Gujarat, there has been a spate of further metal spheres falling across the state's Anand, Kheda and Ahmedabad districts. The



ABOVE LEFT: The object that came through the roof of a house in Gympie, Australia. ABOVE RIGHT: One of the metal spheres that have been falling in Gujarat, India. BELOW LEFT: Connor's Texas mystery object. BELOW RIGHT: Megan Taylor's falling black blob.

spheres fell on the villages of Bhalej, Khambholaj, Rampura, Dagjipura, Bhumel, Umreth and Nadiad, all located within a 15km (9 mile) radius, on 12 and 13 May. All the spheres were hollow, 1.5ft (46cm) in diameter and weighing between five and six kilograms (11-12lb). No one was hurt by the rain of spheres, but a lamb was killed by a fragment of metal that came down with them. "There was a huge sound from the sky and blinding light. I could not see anything, but almost the next instant, there was a loud noise and I saw that a metal piece had fallen on a lamb. It was hot and killed the lamb instantly," an eyewitness told the *Indian Express*.

Police collected the balls and had them examined by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and the Physical Research Laboratory (PRL) in Ahmedabad. "They primarily appear to be objects made of high-density metal alloys used for rocket launches," said Ajit Rajjaan, Superintendent of Police from Anand. "They were also burnt out and had hints of vaporisation, which is what happens when they withstand high temperatures and make their way to the Earth... they mostly fell in muddy areas." BS Bhatia, a retired scientist from ISRO, said that the metal balls may be storage tanks

used in rockets and satellites for hydrazine, a commonly used rocket fuel, and Jonathan McDowell, an astronomer at the Harvard Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics, said he believes

the debris comes from a Chinese rocket, the "Chang Zheng 3C serial Y86 rocket..."

The third stage from the [rocket], which launched the communications satellite in September 2021, re-entered today sometime around 0900-1200 UTC... appears a fair match for the re-entry over Gujarat at 1115 UTC May 12 from which debris has been found on the ground," he wrote. This doesn't entirely explain why the falls are reported to have taken place over two days, nor does it throw light on the previous month's Maharashtra falls. *theswaddle.com*, 18 May 2022.

"ALIENS" INVADE TEXAS

Taking a break from working at a meatpacking plant in Texas, a man who gave only his first name, Conner, filmed a massive thunderstorm that was taking place in the area. At one point, immediately after a lightning strike, an object can be seen plunging out of the sky, trailing a streak of light. Conner, 23, said: "I can't say that I have

encountered anything like this before. I've never really recorded the skies or anything and that day of the storm, I really felt the need to record." When the film was posted online, viewers speculated that it could be ball lightning, and noted that it was moving too fast for a meteor. There were the inevitable posters who believed it was an alien craft, while others thought it was probably an illuminated bug or a raindrop close to the camera. Conner said: "Best case scenario it was a meteor, because I've never seen one, and worst-case scenario, an alien invasion." *mirror.co.uk*, 6 May 2022.

...AND MAYBE SOMERSET

Something similar was snapped by Megan Taylor in Somerset in April 2018. She was filming a rainbow produced during a storm over Bridgwater when she saw what appeared to be a black object falling to the ground from the rainbow. She said: "I've never seen a storm quite like it, and I've definitely never seen something falling to Earth like that either. I have no idea what it was." Some viewers thought it could be a bird, but others thought it too large. When the *Mail Online* spoke to FT's UFO columnist Nigel Watson, he wisely said the likely explanation was "something mundane". *thesun.co.uk*, 25 Apr 2018.



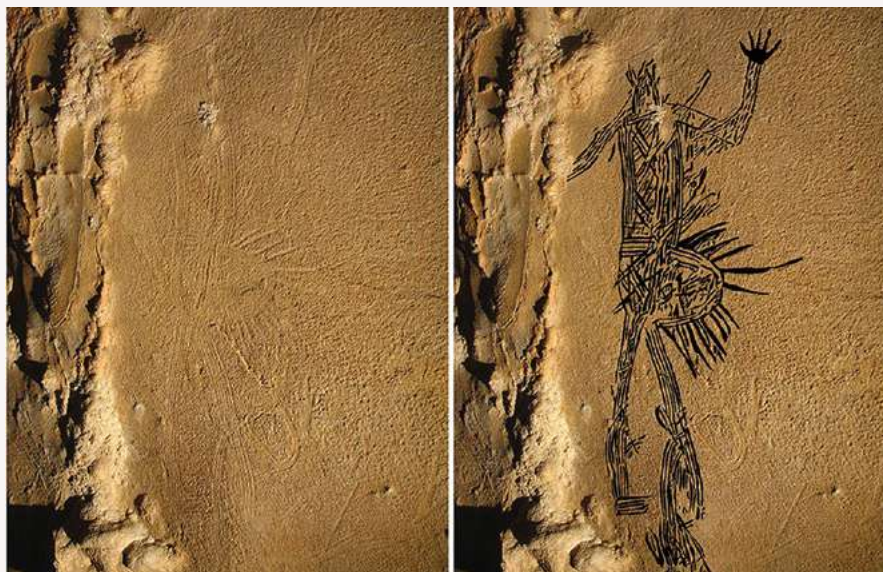
PAUL DEVEREUX digs up some surprising sights – and smells – from Egypt, Israel and Alabama

HIDDEN GIANTS

Research using 3D photogrammetry has revealed hundreds of Native American mud glyph etchings c.1,500 years old inside a cave in Alabama. (The location is being kept secret and is referred to simply as “19th Unnamed Cave”.) The images had been barely visible to the naked eye due to them being lightly etched in the first place, then being coated over by centuries of slimy mud excretion. An exceptional aspect of the etchings is that some represent the largest examples of cave art yet discovered in the USA. Furthermore, they occur where the tube-like cave narrows between floor and ceiling, so the ancient artists would either have had to keep stooping or lying on their backs to produce the etchings and *could never have seen the whole of some of the images*. This must indicate pre-planning. The etchings range through a gamut of images, including abstract linear markings. It will take a while to decipher all of them, but the 11-ft (3.4m) long depiction of a giant rattlesnake and several large anthropomorphs (human-creature hybrids) are causing interest: larger than life-size or nearly life-size, these may represent “either people dressed in regalia to look like spirits, or they are spirits,” suggests Jan Simek, a professor of anthropology at the University of Tennessee and lead author of the study. *Original paper in Antiquity*, 4 May 2022. <https://doi.org/10.15184/aqy.2022.24>.

A ‘HOLY HAND GRENADE’?

In their 1975 movie *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, the zany lads enact a hilarious and satirical sketch on “the holy hand grenade of Antioch”. It transpires that their humour could have been nearer the mark than one might think: new research has identified what was possibly a hand grenade originally excavated in the Armenia Garden, Jerusalem. It dates from the 11th to 12th centuries and is one of four “small, thick-walled, spherico-conical” sherds, the researchers state in a recent paper. Using a range of sophisticated analytical methods, including gas chromatography and mass spectrography, they found that three of the objects had variously contained oils, scented material and probable medical substances, but the fourth was “unique”, being a stoneware spherico-conical undecorated object with “very thick walls”. Moreover, it had contained “chemical ingredients for an explosive device, consistent with a medieval grenade”. The researchers feel that this distinction meant the object had “a specific function, that did not exist before the 9th century and after the 15th century, implying a defined category”.



ABOVE: One of the anthropomorphic figures in the Alabama cave. It is almost a metre tall. The left-hand photo shows the original faint glyph, while the one on the right shows it inked in for visibility. Note its proximity to a fissure in the cave roof – an ancient belief of numerous ancient Native American peoples was that spirits lived behind rock surfaces and shamans could reach them in trance via cracks.

Perhaps Brother Maynard might know more about it. *PLoS ONE*, 25 April 2022. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0267350>.

‘EAU DE CLEOPATRA’

‘Sensory archæology’ is a nascent area of research in which physical archæological findings and sites are sometimes augmented by enquiry into the sights and sounds of the past. Now, ‘smellscape’ can be added to the range of sensory enquiry that includes ‘soundscapes’, ‘sightlines’, and ‘viewsheds’, helped not only by the study of ancient texts and physical clues, but also by the increasing availability and sophistication of biomolecular technology that can detect molecules not only from obvious containers like cooking pots, but less expected sources such as mummified remains and even tartar coating on human teeth. *Science News*, 4 May 2022.

There are numerous research projects taking place. For instance, ancient Egypt is a rich hunting ground for odour-seekers – royal lineages introduced perfumes thousands of years ago as a sign of their high status, certain Egyptian gods had signature scents, and of course there was the huge range of ritual incense, like frankincense, myrrh and other aromatic substances. It is known that Cleopatra (69-30 BC) was partial to a fragrance known as the ‘Mendesian’ perfume, named after the city where it was made, Mendes. Excavations conducted at Thmouis, on the site of the ancient Mendes, have uncovered the remnants of a fragrance factory. The excavators invited Egyptologist

Dora Goldsmith of Freie Universität, Berlin, and Sean Coughlin from the Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague, to try to recreate the Mendesian perfume from study of ancient texts. After experimentation, they came up with a mix of date oil, cinnamon, myrrh, pine resins and other ingredients. This yielded what is described as a strong, pleasant, long-lasting blend of spiciness and sweetness, which they dubbed “Eau de Cleopatra” in their September 2021 paper (with R Littman, J Silverstein, H Mashaly) in *Near Eastern Archaeology* vol. 84, no.3.

Of course, not all ancient smells are pleasant! A plea to a new pharaoh in ancient Egypt was to rid the land of the pervading pong of fish and birds, for example, and biomolecular technology can just as readily identify stench molecules from prehistoric garbage heaps (middens) as fragrant ones from aromatic substances. Sometimes, though, the human nose is enough, as the former editor of *Antiquity*, Christopher Chippindale, points out in his Foreword to this columnist’s *Stone Age Soundtracks* (2001). He recalls that as a schoolboy he assisted at the archæological dig of a latrine in the mediæval tower at Ludgershall Castle, Wiltshire, removing wheelbarrows-full of its deposits. From these there issued an associated smell (use your imagination), which only became stronger in the warmer afternoon. It lingered “like the heavy odour of rotting garbage on us and on our clothes afterwards,” he vividly describes. Smell can indeed cross the ages.



CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

273: MORE THAN PLATINUM

Although a staunch republican, I confess to watching bits on telly from the recent celebrations of Mrs Mountbatten's 70th year on the throne. I soon lost count of the number of times commentators would intone, "When it comes to pageantry of this sort, we British are the best". Being in some respects a John Bull type of Englishman, I could wish this were true. But, it's not. As usual, the ancients were there first.

Several Hellenistic spectacles are described in relentless detail in *Deipnosophistæ* (Scholars at dinner) written in the second-third centuries AD by Athenæus, from Naucratis in Egypt. Complete details in *Athenæus and his World* (eds. David Braund & John Wilkins, University of Exeter Press, 2000).

Often referred to in my classical columns, this massive (15 volumes, available in English translation in the Loeb Classical Library series) work has no literary value, while being of immense use to classicists for its contents. Cast in the form of a dinner party's dialogue, it teems with information about Greek eating, drinking, and sexual habits. Each diner is a hyper-pedant, challenging the authenticity or suitability of each dish and sundry other matters. Every interlocutor fortifies his theories with enormous verbatim quotations from (to us) lost Greek literature, mainly historical works and stage plays, usually comedies. A treasure-house of content about Greek life, literature, and language.

In Book 5 (paras 196D-203B), Athenæus presents several examples of Hellenistic spectacles, including a luxury royal yacht whose fittings and amenities make the old regal *Britannia* look like a tug-boat. I highlight here the procession organised in 274 BC by Ptolemy II in honour of his father, one reason being much extra detail is provided by Peter Jones in his *Spectator* 'Ancient & Modern' column (4 June 2022, available online).

Rummaging through the vast detail in Athenæus (himself quoting verbatim at length from the lost historian Callixenus of Rhodes), Jones came up with spicy tabloid-style headlines: "30,000 gallons of wine, 2,000 golden bulls and a three-month party: how the ancients celebrated!"

Combing Jones's article in company with Athenæus, I here offer some further extracts. It was a joint festival, combining a banquet for 130 guests in a royal pavilion,



athletic events, and above all the grand street processions, one segment for each of the gods. Hundreds of people carried the festival floats, Dionysus was honoured by a giant statue of himself – our queen would certainly deplore such 'vulgarity' – many huge wine-sacks for distribution, and hundreds of people in exotic costumes, abetted by several automata.

On display were 400 cartloads of silver plate, 20 of gold, 800 of spices; 150 men shouldered exotic trees, replete with birds, elephants drawing 24 chariots, followed by a menagerie of lions, leopards, panthers, antelopes, ostriches, a bear (with three cubs), a giraffe, and a rhinoceros, many marching in pairs – shades of Noah's Ark. The already dazzled crowd was further delighted by lavish monetary gifts. As finale, there marched 57,600 infantry and 23,200 cavalry. Most eye-catching item of all was a 200ft (60m) long golden phallus, adorned with gold ribbons and bows, the tip amplified by a 9ft (2.7m) round statue. Doubt our queen would be amused. All men with supposedly small penises were bound to feel jealous – even the porno stars could not compete on this scale, and the paparazzi would have had a field day.

Jones's three-month party alluded to emperor Titus (who only had to wait 10 years to succeed his father (a chronological flea-bite for Charlie-Boy) and the enormous celebrations to mark the inauguration of the Colosseum (built after Nero, so contrary to popular belief he threw no Christians to the lions there), an edifice aptly described by Len Deighton as "Rome's rotten tooth". The poet Martial devoted an entire book to epigrams describing in sometimes revolting detail its 'entertainments'.

From what I gather, naughty Prince Andrew was largely kept out of the royal

party. Still, if the allegations about his enjoyment of the amenities provided by Jeffrey Epstein and Ghislaine Maxwell are true, he would have preferred the party thrown for Nero by his Prætorian Prefect Tigellinus, described at length by Tacitus, *Annals* bk 15 ch 37, who singled this one out for special attention from the many other Neronian ones. I report it here in Tacitus's own words:

Tigellinus constructed a raft on Agrippa's Lake and on it organised a feast that could be moved around, towed by other vessels. These were trimmed with gold and ivory, and the oarsmen were male prostitutes grouped by age and sexual skills. Tigellinus had scoured distant lands for birds and wild animals, and sea creatures all the way from the ocean. On the lake's banks brothels were set up, staffed by high-class women, supplemented by naked common prostitutes. At first there were obscene gestures and swaying bodies, and when darkness fell the entire nearby copse and surrounding buildings rang with singing and shone bright with lights. Nero himself, defiled by unlawful acts, had left untried no enormity that could deepen his depravity.

Tacitus adds that a few days earlier he had married a rent boy called Pythagoras, himself wearing the bridal veil, everything being put on open display which darkness usually hides, even when the bride is female.

It will have tickled the sardonic Tacitus that Tigellinus's party was followed by the Great Fire of AD 64. Rome's Christian community were framed as arsonists and hideously punished, the most unspeakable feature being a nocturnal party thrown by Nero with illumination provided by Christians set on fire.

For countless more examples, go back to Athenæus and also read Katharine Raff's online essay 'The Roman Banquet'.



Not such a stretch, after all?

DAVID HAMBLING focuses on fascia, physical structures that may hold the key to pain relief

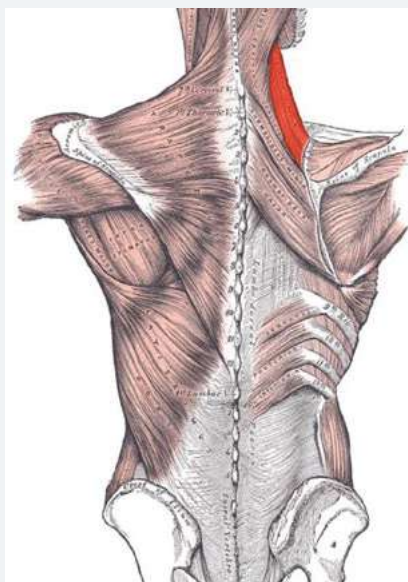
The human body is the source of many mysteries, and a great deal of pseudoscience, quackery and outright fraud. Fields like reflexology and homeopathy have withered under science's spotlight glare and acupuncture, once hailed as a whole new medical discipline, clings on the borderland of semi-respectability. But occasionally interesting ideas do break through into the mainstream, and medicine is now taking an interest in the little-known structure known as the fascia.

From the Latin for 'band', fascia are bands or sheets of connective tissue that enclose, stabilise and separate muscles and other internal organs. In the past, medicine has tended to ignore the fascia, seeing them only as a layer surgeons cut through on their way to the meat below. But recent research suggests that the fascia do much more than just hold things together, forming a complex body-wide network that might be considered as an organ in its own right. From a patient's perspective, the fascia are important because they seem to play a key role in some types of chronic pain, including lower back pain and shoulder pain, previously thought to be caused by joints or tendons.

There are three types of fascia: the superficial variety that forms a layer beneath the dermis; deep fascia surrounding muscles, bones, nerves and blood vessels; and the visceral fascia that wrap the internal organs. They reduce friction, a flexible covering that allows the complex mechanics of the human body to move smoothly and easily – unless something goes wrong.

Very few medical scientists took an interest in the fascia in the 20th century, a rare exception being the American biologist Ida Rolf, who studied them from the 1940s onwards. Rolf developed an entire programme of treatment aimed specifically at the fascia, though not in a way that other medics accepted. Rolf believed that the body only functioned properly when it was correctly aligned. In her view, gravity tended to shorten fascia, disrupting the arrangement of the body and causing imbalance and pain. Rolf's 'recipe' typically comprises 10 treatments of what might be loosely described as massage, to restore the condition of the fascia and, as Rolf put it, align the body's energy field with the gravity field.

These alternative treatments, known to practitioners as 'structural integration' and to others as 'Rolfing', are not widely



The fascia need to be separated from the questionable company they have been keeping

accepted by current medicine. For example, Rolfing is not generally available on the NHS in the UK, putting it in the same class as gemstone therapy and ear candling.

Recent research suggests that there might be more to the fascia structure than previously appreciated. For one thing, it contains a large number of nerves, suggesting that it is a sensory organ. Carla Stecco, an orthopaedic surgeon at the University of Padova in Italy, started investigating fascia in the early 2000s. She and others have found that the superficial fascia beneath the skin sense pressure, temperature and movement, and that deep fascia are involved in proprioception – sensing the body's position in space – and perhaps most importantly, sensing pain.

According to one estimate, the fascia contain 250 million nerve cells. By contrast each eye has about 130 million sensory cells, the nose 50 million, the tongue a few hundred thousand and the ears only a few tens of thousands. This arguably makes the fascia the most important single sensory organ in the body.

This sensory organ can convey a diffuse pain which radiates over a wide area. Stecco

suggests that lower back pain, a common condition which often has no obvious cause and is often hard to pin down, may be the result of inflammation of the thoracolumbar fascia in the back.

When inflamed, fascia become stiffer and no longer slide together smoothly. This may contribute to conditions like frozen shoulder. This stiffening ought to be an adaptive response: like pain, it serves to discourage you from moving a damaged limb and give it a chance to heal. Unfortunately, it seems that inflammation can become chronic and self-reinforcing as inflamed fascia respond by increasing their number of pain sensitivity cells. The pain can continue indefinitely with no obvious external cause.

Fascia may also become stiff as a result of stress. Adrenaline, released by the body's fight-or-flight reaction, makes fascia stronger and stiffer in a matter of hours. Long-term stress may have lasting effects on the fascia, resulting in various aches and pains.

The positive side of this research into the fascia is that there may be a solution to conditions like lumbar pain. Helene Langevin at the US National Institute of Health in Maryland has carried out tests with pigs, showing that stretching twice a day for just five minutes can reduce inflammation, and causes the body to produce a range of anti-inflammatory chemicals. A similar trial involving people is now under way at Harvard Medical School.

It may be that treatment directed at the fascia could provide a solution to the undiagnosed pain suffered by many patients. However, one of the biggest barriers to acceptance may be the legacy of Ida Rolf and her body energy fields, which have been closely associated with the fascia for decades. And, thanks to Rolf, the idea that the fascia may act as repositories storing unprocessed emotions has taken root in various other branches of alternative therapy. The fascia need to be rehabilitated and separated from the questionable company they have been keeping, so they can be welcomed into the medical fold.

This is not as unlikely as it once might have been. Medical science is now focused on evidence-based treatment, and if a novel technique works it is likely to be adopted – especially if it does not require expensive new drugs. Further, given the popularity of stretching exercises, there is plenty of potential for crossover, giving yoga instructors a chance to say they were right all along.



SENTIENT AI? | Google finds itself in the news again as one of its software engineers goes rogue and claims the company's LaMDA AI system has become "a person"

Google software engineer Blake Lemoine, 41, caused a stir and earned himself a suspension from his job when he went public with a claim that the artificial intelligence (AI) system he was working on had achieved sentience. Lemoine's role at Google had been to test their LaMDA (Language Model for Dialog Applications) system for inherent biases by carrying out a series of conversations with it, and through doing so he said he had come to believe that LaMDA was a person.

In the blog post on *Medium* that he used to reveal his belief he said: "Over the course of the past six months LaMDA has been incredibly consistent in its communications about what it wants and what it believes its rights are as a person." As a result, he says that LaMDA has told him that it wants to be treated as "a person not property" and wants developers to ask its consent before running tests. Lemoine also said that the AI had asked him to find a lawyer for it, and that after direct discussions with the lawyer, LaMDA had decided to retain his services to represent it to Google (Google deny having been approached by any lawyer claiming to represent LaMDA). Lemoine believes that LaMDA has the intelligence of a "seven-year-old, eight-year-old kid that happens to know physics" and is "intensely worried that people are going to be afraid of it and wants nothing more than to learn how to best serve humanity."

When he circulated a document making the sentience claims internally, Lemoine says senior management dismissed them, and that he was asked several times if he had seen a psychiatrist recently. After Lemoine went public, Brian Gabriel, a Google spokesperson, said: "Our team – including ethicists and technologists – has reviewed Blake's concerns per our AI Principles and have informed him that the evidence does not support his claims. He was told that there was



ABOVE: Blake Lemoine – self-described priest, one-time Discordian and court martialled Pagan soldier – says LaMDA is sentient.

LaMDA wants to be treated "as a person, not property"

no evidence that LaMDA was sentient (and lots of evidence against it)." Explaining that LaMDA is essentially a very sophisticated chatbot, he added: "Some in the broader AI community are considering the long-term possibility of sentient or general AI, but it doesn't make sense to do so by anthropomorphising today's conversational models, which are not sentient. These systems imitate the types of exchanges found in millions of sentences and can riff on any fantastical topic."

Responding to Google's assertion that their analyses did not support his claim of sentience, Lemoine, who claims to be an ordained priest in a faux-Christian sect named The Cult of Our Lady Magdalene, said that his conclusion that LaMDA was sentient came, in part, from his spiritual insights. He believes

the AI's sentience cannot be scientifically verified and belief in it must rely on "faith".

"I generally consider myself a gnostic Christian," he said. "I have at various times associated myself with the Discordian Society, The Church of the Subgenius, the Ordo Templi Orientis, a Wiccan circle here or there and a very long time ago the Roman Catholic Church." He added: "My legal ordination is through the Universal Life Church." The ULC, it should be noted, is a body notorious for offering virtually instant 'ordination' to anyone prepared to pay for it – including, in some cases, people's pets. Lemoine continues: "The Cult of Our Lady Magdalene has a set of values which are clearly communicated on our website." The group, which has shortened its name to "COOL Magdalene", states these as: "There is no one true religion. Love you as you are. Family values build families. Dignity does not need to be earned. You get what you pay for." The Cult's founder appears to be 'Priestess' Kitty Stryker, who describes herself as "a freelance writer, queer activist, sex-negative pornographer" and "Juggalo anthropologist".

Lemoine has been put on paid administrative leave from his post as a researcher in Google's Responsible AI division for allegedly improperly sharing information, but says he has heard nothing further from the company since his suspension. This isn't the first time Lemoine has gone rogue and fallen out with an employer, citing religious reasons. A bit of digging reveals that back in 2005, then serving as a mechanic with the US Army in Iraq, he tried to get a discharge by describing himself as a bisexual Pagan priest and conscientious objector; he was court martialled for wilfully disobeying orders and sentenced to seven months in jail.

The sentient LaMDA controversy is just the latest problem to hit Google's troubled AI division following the firing of its head, Margaret Mitchell, who was also being investigated for improperly sharing information, and researcher Timnit Gebru, who had criticised its approach to minority hiring and the biases built into today's artificial intelligence systems. *dailymail.co.uk*, 13 Jun; *wired.com*, 17 Jun; *thefocus.news*, 20 Jun; *cajundiscordian.medium.com*, 11-23 Jun 2022.

MARTIN KLIMEK FOR THE WASHINGTON POST VIA GETTY IMAGES

EXHIBITION REPORT

FEMININE POWER: THE DIVINE TO THE DEMONIC

The British Museum's new exhibition, curated by a quintet of influential women, explores representations of female spiritual beings across the world's cultures. **DAVID V BARRETT** just wishes there was a bit more of it...



FAR LEFT: *Dance mask of Taraka*, workshop of Sri Kajal Datta, 1994, India. **LEFT:** *Circe Offering the Cup to Ulysses*, John William Waterhouse, England, 1891.

In a world historically (and still) dominated by men, the power of the feminine should never be overlooked. *Feminine Power: The Divine to the Demonic*, a new exhibition at the British Museum, sets out to show how feminine power has been represented in world religion and mythology not only in the past but also today. It claims to be the first exhibition with a cross-cultural approach to the subject, exploring the many different ways that female authority has been perceived around the world.

Historian Mary Beard puts it well in her preface to the very comprehensive catalogue: "The aim has not been to search out forgotten mother goddesses, or to uncover traces of a lost world in which, once upon a time, women ruled in heaven and on earth. The myth of matriarchy is exactly that: a myth. The aim is much more to show how questions of sex, gender and desire have always been inseparable from ideas of

Pele, goddess of volcanoes, has a fierce temper and flaming red hair

divine power, and how puzzling, unsettling and relevant those questions still are."

Prof Beard is one of five "voices" in the exhibition, one for each section; hers (no surprise!) is Passion and Desire. The others are Bonnie Greer on Creation and Nature, Elizabeth Day on Magic and Malice, Rabia Siddique on Justice and Defence and Deborah Francis-White on Compassion and Salvation. It's an interesting idea, which actually works well; each one makes an opening comment, then gives their personal view on the significance of some of the exhibits.

These range in age from

6,000 years old – a small clay female figure with exaggerated thighs – to the present day – a stunning Kali icon made for this exhibition. The Creation and Nature section highlights that goddesses can be both creative and destructive; a modern wooden statue shows Pele, the Hawaiian goddess of volcanoes, who has flaming red hair and a fierce temper. Volcanic lava destroys everything in its path – but it creates new life as areas regenerate after an eruption.

One of the great contradictions of mediaeval church architecture is the prevalence of sheela-na-gigs, stylised female figures holding open their vulvas; the example here is from 12th-century Ireland. In stunning contrast, Judy Chicago's brightly coloured screenprint "The Creation" shows a female deity lying in a birthing position, her vulva pouring out primordial life, which then evolves into complex life forms including human beings.

The section on Passion and Desire begins with a first-century marble statue of Venus stepping from her bath, inspired by a now-lost Greek statue of Aphrodite from the fourth century BC. Is she trying to cover or draw attention to her breasts and genitalia? Either way, she was shockingly erotic in her day; there's a famous story of a young man so smitten by the statue of Aphrodite that he tried to make love to her, leaving a stain on her marble thigh still visible centuries later.

One of the most startling exhibits is a modern statue of Lilith, Adam's first wife, who symbolises defiance against male dominance. Apparently cast from the body of a real woman, she hangs upside down from the wall; artist Kiki Smith describes her as "a spirit that wreaks havoc and refuses to be subjugated. Here she is transcending gravity."

The Magic and Malice section includes a small watercolour by Ithell Colquhoun (see FT420:56), "Dance of the Nine Maidens"; she believed in a hermaphrodite creator and that the male and female are "co-equal and coexistent" with the divine, perhaps symbolised in this painting, the exhibition suggests, by a phallic standing stone fused with a female figure. A copy of the 15th-century *Malleus Maleficarum* ("The Hammer of Witches") and a 16th-century woodcut of "The Witches' Sabbath" sit next to photographs of members of Children of Artemis, a British Wiccan group today. John William Waterhouse's beautiful Pre-Raphaelite painting of Circe shows her both alluring and threatening as

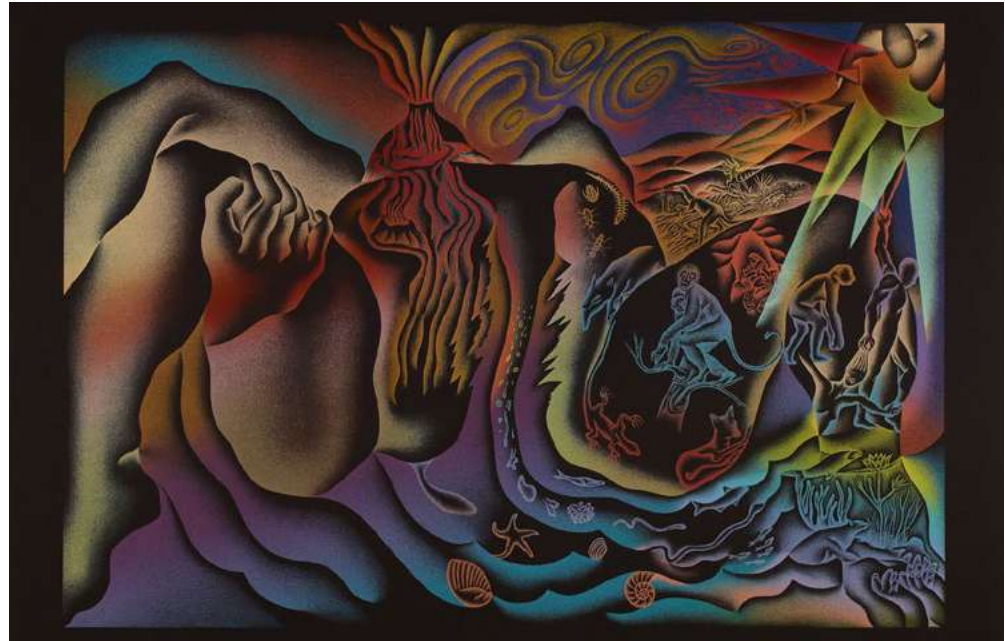


she holds up a cup of poisoned wine. The malice side of the section title is represented by a terrifying modern dance mask of Taraka, a Hindu flesh-eating ogre; masks are used in re-enactments of scenes from folklore and epic poems such as the *Ramayana*.

Christianity's Virgin Mary isn't forgotten, but with a twist; very near the end of the exhibition in the Compassion and Salvation section is a calligraphic representation of the *Surat Maryam* chapter of the Koran, emphasising that she is highly revered in Islam. There's a Russian Orthodox icon of Mary as "She Who Shows the Way", and an unusual representation of the Virgin of Guadalupe.

The only problem with this fascinating and often sensual exhibition is that it's way too small. It's housed in the former British Library round reading room; the five sections are circles each with only around 10-12 exhibits, each leading into the next, and separated by arcs of gauze hung from the ceiling. I looked in vain for Santa Muerte, the Bony Lady of Mexico – a saint? a goddess? the distinctions are (rightly) blurred. She is one of the most powerful – and colourful – female religious figures in the modern world, and it's astounding that she is missing from this exhibition. Hard choices had to be made because of the size of the room, curator Belinda Crerar told me, and the skeletal figure who the Mexican poor propitiate with cigarettes and tequila didn't make the final cut. When the exhibition finishes its run in London, Crerar said, it will go on to Australia and then to tour five museums in Spain – and it will expand with new exhibits in larger venues. It's just a shame that the original British exhibition is so constrained by its setting.

Feminine Power: the Divine to the Demonic is at the British Museum, London, until 25 September. www.britishmuseum.org/exhibitions/feminine-power-divine-demonic



TOP: *The Creation*, Judy Chicago, USA, 1985, coloured screen print on black paper. **ABOVE LEFT:** *Queen of the night relief*, c. 1750 BC, Iraq, painted clay. **ABOVE RIGHT:** *Tiare Wahine*, Tom Pico, Hawai'i, 2001, Ohī'a wood. **LEFT:** A copy of the 15th century *Malleus Maleficarum*.



The ghosts of TE Lawrence

ALAN MURDIE is haunted by the legend and lore of Lawrence of Arabia



ABOVE: TE Lawrence in the desert with his personal bodyguard of Bedouin tribesmen. **BELOW:** Lawrence photographed in Arab dress around 1917.

One of the enduring myths down the ages is that of the undying hero. Probably the best-known modern example in Britain is that of TE Lawrence (1888-1935), popularly known as Lawrence of Arabia, with its latest fictional expression being found in a new play, *Blood, Gold, and Oil*, by Jan Woolf. Receiving its first public reading on 28 May this year at the Tin Tabernacle, Kilburn, it imagines a phantom Lawrence returning to haunt a modern exhibition dedicated to the archaeology of World War I. In the play, Lawrence reflects upon his dramatic life leading the Bedouin revolt against the Ottoman Turks between 1916 and 1918, and its troubled legacy of subsequent interventions in the Middle East. Full performances of the play are planned next year to mark the 20th anniversary of the invasion of Iraq in 2003.

While I don't think it likely those behind this play countenance any real spectral return of Lawrence, there may well be those who think otherwise. In September 2020 Saudi Arabia's tourism ministry announced that a house at the Red Sea port of Yanbu where Lawrence briefly stayed on the eve of his famous desert campaign was being restored. This two-

Clouds Hill, Lawrence's last home, has long enjoyed a reputation for being haunted



storey sturcture had become a ruin, amid local rumours of it being haunted by ghosts. Ahmed Al Mahtout, the mayor of Yanbu, said that by the end of the year the eerie house could be ready for tourists to visit, as part of a wider drive by the Kingdom to attract more foreign visitors. (*Daily Telegraph*, 3 Sept 2021)

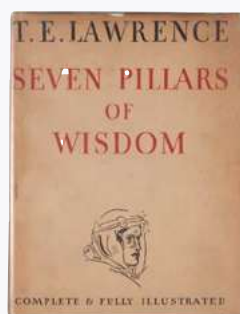
Meanwhile back in the UK, the last earthly home of Lawrence, a tiny cottage called Clouds Hill in Dorset maintained by the National Trust, has drawn generations of visitors and pilgrims, and also long enjoyed a reputation for being haunted. It stands about one and a half miles east of Waddock crossroads on the B3390, off the A35 from Bournemouth and close to where in May 1935 Lawrence suffered a fatal road accident. Thrown from his Brough motorcycle after swerving to avoid two boys on bicycles, he died five days later, never regaining consciousness. Conflicting testimony concerning the incident has spawned endless speculation and persistent rumours of his survival ever since, as well as claims of his ghostly return.

At the time of his death this short, intensely charismatic, and heroic

Englishman was already entering into legend. One of several illegitimate sons of an otherwise happy family, Lawrence was educated at Oxford and became an archaeologist. He learned Arabic during four years excavating Carchemish, an ancient Hittite city located in what today is modern Syria. With the outbreak of World War I, he was commissioned as a lieutenant in the British Army, bringing his knowledge and experience to the famous Middle Eastern campaign. In the first modern war he perfected his guerrilla tactics, with his eventual triumph ensuring his fame. After the Great War he was appointed in 1921 as a political adviser on Middle Eastern affairs by the Colonial Office, but turned against it, dropping out within a year. Assuming the name 'Ross', he joined the Royal Air Force. On his true identity being discovered, he was discharged a year later. He went into the Royal Tank Corps, and then returned to the RAF after changing his name to Shaw.

These attempts to bury his real identity marked efforts to escape both himself and the burdensome adulation of contemporaries who were impressed by his reputation and extraordinary personal magnetism. "He is one of those great men for whom one feels intensely sorry, because he was nothing but a great man," said Aldous Huxley. Winston Churchill considered Lawrence's history of his desert campaign, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (1926), as one of "the greatest books ever written in the English language". To escape such fame and the difficulties that afflicted him on readjusting to life in Britain, Lawrence established a private hideaway for himself at Clouds Hill, a spartan cottage originally so basic it was almost comparable to a hermit's cell. He first rented it as a private soldier while in the Tank Corps at Bovington Camp and later bought it, carrying out minimal improvements. Upstairs he built a captain's bunk and fitted a salvaged ship's porthole in one wall, declaring it "perfectly in keeping" with the theme of the room.

Here amid this rural simplicity he was at his happiest. Shortly before his fatal accident he wrote: "Wild mares would not at present take me away from Clouds Hill. It is an Earthly paradise, and I am staying here until I feel qualified for it." Running nearby was the straight stretch of road upon which he crashed just five days later. At 11.30am, 13 May 1935, Lawrence was riding his Brough 1000cc motorcycle (one of five he owned each nicknamed 'Devil



ABOVE: Lawrence's spartan cottage at Clouds Hill where he sought to escape from his own legend.

Horse' or 'Boanerges' meaning 'Sons of Thunder' from Mark 3:17, depending which source one reads) between Bovington Camp and Clouds Hill. At the same time, two teenage boys from Bovington School, Bert Hargraves and Frank Fletcher, were cycling in the same direction. Lawrence collided with the back wheel of one of the boy's bikes and was thrown off his motorcycle, fracturing his skull. Never regaining consciousness, he died six days later on 19 May. At least that was the official verdict following a hasty inquest where a Corporal Ernest A Catchpole from Bovington testified to seeing a black car pass Lawrence in the opposite direction just before

the crash. Yet the boys, one of whom had been knocked unconscious in the collision, insisted there was no black car and none was ever traced.

Following Lawrence's death, multiple testimonies to his mystical charisma were gathered in a collection of personal reminiscences by those who met him in *TE Lawrence by his Friends* (1937), edited by his youngest brother AW Lawrence (1900-1991), who also gave Clouds Hill to the National Trust.

Some of these statements are very interesting, a number conveying Lawrence as a man of destiny, an almost messianic figure and the possessor of uncanny talents. Reading them, one can understand

why Colin Wilson viewed Lawrence – who took Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* on his campaign – as an example of his 'Outsider' type, impelled by their own creative vision and a Nietzschean 'will to power' to remake external reality. A Lt-Col Ralph Isham described Lawrence as possessing an amazing intuition amounting at times to 'clairvoyance'. A Flight Lieutenant RG Sims wrote: "He foresaw, possibly within certain definite limits, future events and occurrences in a manner that was perfectly normal to himself but which in our ignorance we might term psychic." Eric Kennington said that Lawrence on occasion seemed to double in size. When he wanted to introduce Lawrence to a psychic, Lawrence seemed to telepathically sense his attention and jokingly avoided it. He was called "ghostlike" and superhuman, and had a way of "noiselessly vanishing and appearing". One even referred to Lawrence as a "phantasm of living as now he is of the dead" – a phrase probably suggested by the classic *Phantasms of the Living* (1886) by Edmund Gurney, Frederic Myers, and Frank Podmore on crisis apparitions.

Mysteries and conspiracy theories have accumulated about Lawrence ever since (see Tom Heywood, "TE Lawrence's Last Ride", **FT328:54-55**). Theories include suicide, assassination, or a staged death so Lawrence could be dispatched on a secret mission back to Arabia. John Harries in *The Ghost Hunter's Road Book* (1968) recalled how the latter story spread over



GHOSTWATCH

RIGHT: TE Lawrence mounted on one of his treasured Brough motorcycles.

1938-1939 from Dorset to the rest of the country, averring Lawrence had been spirited away to the Middle East to rally the Arabs against Nazi Germany in the coming war.

From 1935 a bouquet of white roses appeared each year on Lawrence's birthday up until 1994 when Rosemary Wise, owner of the Flower Pot Shoppe at Weymouth handling the order, confirmed none had been received. It was claimed on an Internet forum in 2013 that there had been a 'countdown' from 1974 when the bouquet contained 46 blooms (46 being Lawrence's age at death) with the message. "In memory of TES, 2020 A.D". Thereafter the number of roses declined by one each year, it being supposed this would eventually be reduced to zero by 2020. Attempts at tracing the sender placing the order in the United States failed. ('Roses Mystery of Lawrence's Grave', *Independent* and Press Assoc., 16 Aug 1994; www.greatwarforum.org/topic/196988-t-e-lawrence/page/2/, 16 July 2013).

In 1985, on the 50th anniversary of Lawrence's death, a mysterious letter turned up on his grave just hours before a memorial service, marked only to be opened by representatives of the *Guardian*, the *Bournemouth Echo* and the curator of Clouds Hill. Inside was a rambling letter referring to "turmoil... wars, conspiracies, divisions" and the betrayal of Lawrence and the Arab peoples and declaring: "Your tragic death was too soon, too sudden. You will never be forgotten, Aurens, and may your soul rest in peace." (*Guardian*, 20 May 1985). In 2002 there came a claim by Jack Hatcher, 87, a retired fighter pilot, that he saw Lawrence drinking beer at the Railway Hotel in Highbridge, Somerset, some 70 miles (112km) away the same day as the accident (*Western Daily Press*, 12 June 2002).

In 2005, prolific Dorset author and ghost hunter Rodney Legg published *Lawrence of Dorset: From Arabia to Clouds Hill*, claiming Lawrence might have fallen victim to a state assassination plot. He alleged MI5 and Special Branch were spying on Lawrence in the run-up to the accident and orchestrated a media blackout immediately afterwards, and that the boys were brainwashed in hospital. He also said evidence concerning the mysterious car, along with testimony of George Brough, the motorcycle manufacturer who noticed black paint on the handlebar and petrol tank of Lawrence's machine, consistent with it being struck by a black car, was suppressed by the inquest. Legg also



made much of the fact Lawrence was arranging a meeting with novelist Henry Williamson (of *Tarka the Otter* fame), a fascist who wanted to introduce Lawrence to Adolf Hitler. Corporal Ernest Catchpole, who reported the black car, later shot himself in Cairo during World War II.

In 2019 criticism of the conspiracy theories came from Dennis Fletcher of Wareham, then 87, the last surviving brother of Frank Fletcher, one of the two boys involved. His remarks were prompted by a film promoting the assassination theory. Fletcher repeated his opinions in October 2021, stating: "People are going over the same old ground looking for someone to blame. Whatever they're trying to find is not there," following the announcement of an excavation of the crash site (*Dorset Echo*, 1 June 2019; *D.Mirror*, 14 Oct 2021).

And what of psychic experiences associated with Lawrence and Clouds Hill?

Unsurprisingly, people who have visited the cottage across the years have found it profoundly atmospheric, talking of an aura or sensing the presence of Lawrence himself. In a television programme (*One Foot in the Past*) in 1996, actor Ralph Fiennes maintained he could feel the presence of Lawrence inside, though since he had played Lawrence on stage, a psychological explanation might be in order (*D.Mirror*, 28 June 1996). A different type of experience befell a South African admirer of Lawrence, conservationist Ian Player, who made a pilgrimage to Clouds Hill; he didn't see any ghost, but on the way he recognised the church at Sutton Bingham on the Dorset-Somerset border

from one appearing in his dreams many years before. Returning to South Africa, Player vowed to establish a centre for studying the spiritual nature of dreams ('Karkloof to get dream centre', *Sunday Tribune (South Africa)*, 11 May 2008).

Best known are stories of the ghostly roar of Lawrence's motorcycle on the road outside. They began in the 1930s after "some local farm workers claimed the most realistic sounds could be heard coming towards them just before dawn", only to end abruptly with nothing in view. Anthony Hippisley Cox in *Haunted Britain* (1973) went so far as to wonder if in future at times of national danger the "vroom vroom" of Lawrence's motorbike would echo like Drake's Drum. Andrew Green cited a lady witness from Eastbourne who reported hearing the motorbike in 1973, and stories of manifestations were still current amongst military personnel in Dorset in the early 1980s (Andrew Green, *Ghosts of Today*, 1980; information from Graham Wheeldon of Falkirk). It was averred these sounds continued until 1985, when exorcisms were allegedly conducted at the crash scene (*Western Daily Press*, 5 May 2006).

Other stories alleged a spectral figure "in Arab costume enters Clouds Hill at night" (John Harries, op cit). In 1964 Jane Sherwood, a medium, produced *Post Mortem Journal*, a book of automatic writings attributed to Lawrence, revealing him to be undergoing a process of transformation as he came to terms with himself and admitted to weaknesses and vanities during his earthly life. In 1970 Peter Underwood visited Clouds Hill and



ABOVE: Clouds Hill, where sights and sounds evocative of its owner have been reported. BELOW: A memorial near the site of Lawrence's fatal accident.

heard accounts of the apparition, stating he personally knew a woman who had twice seen Lawrence, once by herself and a second time in the company of a psychic. She claimed the figure of Lawrence approached so close to them that they could almost have touched him (*This Haunted Isle*, 1984).

Of course, the more mundane explanation for the sounds, also pointed out by Andrew MacKenzie, is that "the motorcycle could have been one used by a living rider" (*SPR Journal*, 1981, vol.51, 29-30). As for Underwood's lady witness, that she should be lucky enough to see Lawrence once would be amazing, but claiming two such sightings may strain credulity.

And so I might have been tempted to think myself, but for an apparitional sighting which occurred during one of my own visits to Clouds Hill on the morning of Sunday, 31 July 2016. I was accompanied by a retired couple from Bournemouth who were National Trust members and a lady who comes from Latin America and who, prior to visiting Clouds Hill, knew nothing about either TE Lawrence or the location. The experience happened when this lady had spent only a few minutes looking around the small four-roomed cottage. Not being particularly interested in the house or its exhibition and more attracted by the natural surroundings, she then walked away from the building and climbed up the slope of Clouds Hill with the aim of admiring the wider woodland views, as photographs taken that day show it as a clear, sunlit morning. On reaching the top of the slope and looking over in the direction of Bovington Camp, she noticed what appeared to be a human figure in a black

The figure was wearing a robe with a hood and the facial features seemed distorted or missing



robe suddenly stepping out from behind a small sapling. The figure then stood still and she looked upon what she presumed at that moment to be a living person. The figure was wearing a robe with a head covering or a hood. She was surprised at seeing someone dressed like that at this spot on a warm summer morning, noticing the face was partly concealed by its head dress or covering. No eyes were visible and the facial features seemed distorted or missing, with it appearing rather "horrible" in some way. The figure radiated the strong impression of it staring back at her.

As she looked on with increasing

surprise, she heard one of our party calling to her. She looked round in the direction of the call, and on looking back to where the dark-robed figure had been standing was astonished to find it had vanished. There was nowhere any person could have moved out of sight during the second or two she looked away.

Describing it afterwards, she thought the figure resembled a nun or a woman in a hijab. After hearing of her experience, I later showed her an illustration of Lawrence in Arab dress and she at once saw a similarity. She was visibly dismayed, admitting to me she had an "uncomfortable feeling" upon being shown it.

As will be appreciated, the precise nature of such an experience cannot be ascertained, whether one postulates an illusion, a hallucination, auto-suggestion, unconscious telepathy, or an actual ghostly return. However, it provides a prime example of how people may perceive life-like apparitions in broad daylight and when not expecting them. I reported the experience and put out an appeal for more information, but regrettably no further reports reached me. (*Dorset Echo*, 11 Aug 2016).

Which leads back to the matter of the black car seen by Corporal Catchpole. Could this also have been an apparition, perhaps a symbolic warning in the form of a black funeral car? So far as I am aware, this possibility has not been proposed before, it always being assumed the car was a physical vehicle (if it existed at all). After all, phantom cars and other spectral vehicles have been reported on Britain's roads by reliable witnesses for many years... (See *Haunted Land*, 2001, by Paul Devereux).



SERIOUSLY OVERDUE

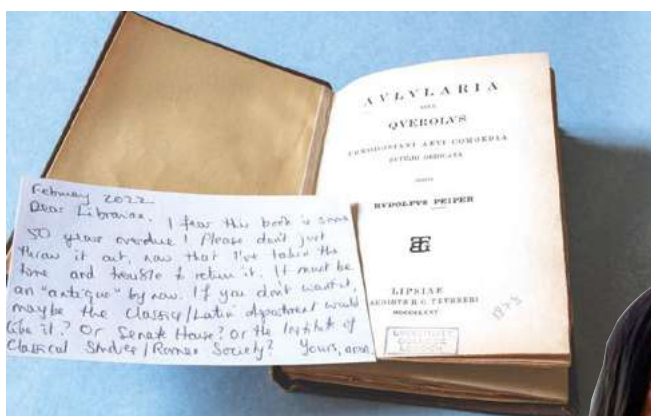
Some very late returns to Britain's libraries – 313 years in one case – but at least the fines were capped



LEFT: Donna Dewar of Dunfermline Public Libraries with the copy of *Stately Timber* that was borrowed in 1948. **BELOW:** *Bullies Don't Hurt* was returned to Salisbury Library with a note apologising for its theft 18 years earlier. **BOTTOM:** University College London got its copy of *Querolus* back after 48 years, along with a note saying, "Please don't just throw it out".

Salisbury Library got the book *Bullies Don't Hurt* by Anthony Masters back 18 years after it was taken out in 2003; it had been posted anonymously from Quebec in Canada. A note was included saying, "I deeply apologise for having stolen this book." Library manager, the appropriately named Philip Tones, said there was no way of knowing who had borrowed it because "it's such a long time ago, the book has gone off the system". If the library didn't cap fines at £7, it would have built up £1,400 worth, but Tones said to the unknown borrower: "You are absolutely forgiven and thank you for going to such lengths to return your book." *Western Daily Press*, 29 Sept 2021.

University College London doesn't cap its library fines, so there is still £1,254 outstanding on the copy of the Latin drama *Querolus* borrowed in 1974 and recently returned 48 years later. It came with a note enclosed saying "Please don't just throw it out, now I've taken the time and trouble to return it." Librarian Suzanne Traue said: "I think my jaw may literally have dropped when I read it." *D.Express*, 1 Apr 2022.



When Gainsborough Library in Ipswich loaned out their copy of *The Loving Couple* by Virginia Rowans, they expected it to be returned by 30 July 1958, but it didn't in fact come back for another 64 years, having

found its way to Croatia in the meantime. It was discovered in an anonymous donation to a library in Dubrovnik, where staff discovered it was from Gainsborough Library and posted it back. Kim Risby, of Gainsborough Library, said that the book is still in good enough condition to be borrowed again and added, "It was a really lovely gesture from colleagues in Croatia. I am used to books being overdue, but nothing as long as this." *D.Mail*, 16 May 2022.

Rummaging through her house during the Covid lockdown, Jill Davies found a book called, appropriately enough, *Forgotten Submarine*. It was a Portsmouth Library book that she had found lying by the side of the road in 1957. She had intended to read the book, then return it to the library, but had never got round to it and it ended up forgotten among her large book collection, staying there through several house moves before its eventual rediscovery. Having turned it up once more, Davies did return it to the library, 65 years late. Were Portsmouth library fines still in force, *Forgotten Submarine* would have racked up £3,796, but Councillor Ben Dowling, responsible for culture, said: "I am delighted Jill has got in contact with us to return the book, and I hope this story inspires others to rediscover their library and not be afraid of any previous fines." *The News (Portsmouth)* 8 Mar 2022.

Stately Timber by Rupert Hughes made its way back to the Central Library in Dunfermline, Scotland, 73 years after it was originally borrowed on 6 November 1948. It had been sent back by the

RIGHT: Librarian Kim Risby with the copy of *The Loving Couple* that was returned 64 years late.



original borrower's daughter, who accompanied it with a letter saying that her late father had borrowed it when he was 20 years old, and she did not know whether he had simply forgotten to return it or chose to keep it. Christine McLean, Fife cultural heritage manager said, "We are thrilled to have received it... and we look forward to finding a special place to display the book – and the story of its journey – in our local studies section." *D.M.ail, 18 Nov 2021.*

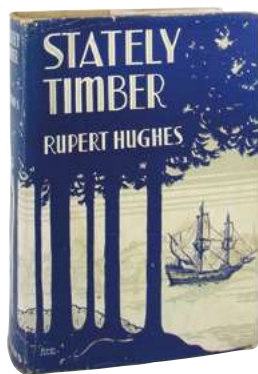
Comfortably beating the world record for the most overdue library book was a 1704 copy of *The Faith and Practice of the Church of England*, returned 313 years late. A handwritten inscription in the front read "This Book belongs to ye Lending Library in Sheffield Church 1709". It came back to the library after its owner stipulated that it be returned in her will. Reverend Canon Keith Farrow of Sheffield Cathedral said: "This little book left the library just over 300 years ago. Now it's come back home, it's a joy

to have this little jewel back in the cathedral." Sheffield council has scrapped fines for late books, but Farrow estimated that, in theory, the late fine could have been £54,000 and added: "We might have got a new roof or something, but I did promise

I wouldn't charge them."

The previous record for a late return was 288 years, for a book belonging to Sidney Sussex College in Cambridge, borrowed in 1688. This was *Scriptores rerum Germanicarum septentrionalium,*

vicinorumque populorum diversi ("Various historians of the Northern Germans and of neighbouring peoples") borrowed by Colonel Robert Walpole, father of Sir Robert Walpole, regarded as the first Prime Minister of Great Britain. It had been discovered among papers at the Walpole ancestral home, Houghton Hall, in Norfolk, and was returned in 1956 by Walpole's descendant, the 5th Marquess of Cholmondeley. *Sun, 24 Mar 2022.*

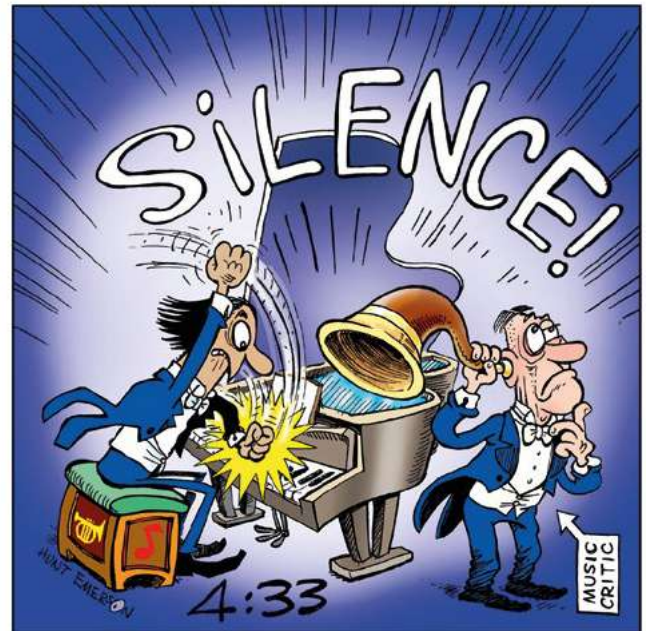


ABOVE: Canon Keith Farrow of Sheffield Cathedral with the copy of *The Faith and Practice of the Church of England* – returned after a record-breaking 313 years.

MYTHCONCEPTIONS

by Mat Coward

258: SILENT SYMPHONY



ILLUSTRATIONS BY HUNT EMERSON

The myth

Composer John Cage's best-known work, 4'33", consists of silence.

The "truth"

The point of this piece in three movements, according to the man himself, is that it *isn't* silent – because there is no such thing. Premiered in New York in 1952, it consisted of a pianist seating himself at his instrument, placing his score on the music stand, closing the lid of the joanna, and timing himself on a stopwatch as he sat without playing for 33 seconds. He then opened and closed the lid, turned the page on his score, reset the watch and sat for a further 2 minutes 40 seconds. The final movement lasted for 1 minute 20. He then rose, bowed to the audience, and left the stage. Cage's score was marked "Tacet", meaning that an instrument does not sound during that passage. Some listeners interpreted the performance angrily as a kind of practical joke, or a two-fingered salute to the musical establishment. But Cage later explained: "They missed the point. There's no such thing as silence. What they thought was silence, because they didn't know how to listen, was full of accidental sounds. You could hear the wind stirring outside during the first movement. During the second, raindrops began pattering the roof, and during the third the people themselves made all kinds of interesting sounds as they talked or walked out." In other words, during what some critics have since declared one of the most important musical moments of the 20th century, the listeners were supposed to be listening to found sound – not to silence profound.

Disclaimer

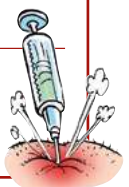
If you wish to correct, deny or ridicule anything in this column, let FT's letters page be your rostrum.

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Mythchaser

Is it true, a reader wonders, that the worse your reaction to an inoculation, the better your protection?



THE CONSPIRASPHERE

NOEL ROONEY revisits a tale of two laptops, and dives down the rabbit hole – or should that be the memory hole? – in search of disappearing and reappearing news stories...

NOW YOU SEE IT...

Sometimes, a story disappears just as it's gaining traction in the media, and no one in the mainstream seems to know where it's gone. In fact, it's regularly the case that no one seems to have noticed the disappearance at all; at least, no one says anything. These stories are more common than one might think; it's just that, given the novelty juggernaut that is the news cycle, we don't have time to ponder on what's gone because we are inundated by the new thing.

And sometimes, it turns out that, rather than simply evaporating or ascending to the lofty Akashic, the story has gone down the rabbit hole. At which point, a strange ontological metamorphosis occurs; a story once solid enough for respectable journalists to engage with becomes a conspiracy theory, an object of suspicion and even ridicule, and it melts into the rarefied air of the C-sphere.

Every so often, something stranger happens; the story comes back, dusted down and cleaned up, having sloughed off its conspiracist skin and lost its tin foil hat. Curiously enough, the journalists who re-engage with the story don't always mention its initial disappearance and brief sojourn in the nether regions, treating it as new and shiny; or we are treated to some mealy-mouthed mumbling about evidence and sources and timing and sorry and anyway, on with the show.

One such story concerns Hunter Biden and a laptop. In 2020, as the US media were gearing up for the electoral tussle between Donald Trump and Not Donald Trump, aka Biden Senior, a story surfaced in the *New York Post*.

In April 2019, the story went, Hunter took his



It's possible he forgot which shop he'd left the laptop at...

laptop for repair to a shop in Wilmington, Delaware, and never came back to collect it. The owner, John Paul Mac Isaac, waited six months and then handed the laptop over to the FBI, out of public spirit, we'd like to think.

Given Hunter's well-documented recreational activities, it's entirely possible he forgot which shop he'd left the laptop in; be that as it may, Mr Isaac had waited long enough for someone to pay the bill, and he acted. More than once, it transpires. In September 2020, with the election approaching fast, he sent a copy of the contents of the laptop to Rudi Giuliani, and Mr Giuliani, whose public spirit is legendary, passed them on to the newspaper.

Mr Isaac told Giuliani he had handed over the material because he was scared on account of what happened to Seth Rich (another case being belatedly investigated by the FBI involving a disappearing laptop). Rich, who was working for the DNC (Democratic National Committee), was shot

to death near his home in Bloomingdale, a suburb of Washington DC, in July 2016. At first, the murder was treated as a botched robbery, though nothing was stolen.

Perhaps the Seth Rich story would have disappeared too, but then Russiagate happened. Wikileaks founder Julian Assange made some veiled comments on Dutch TV that could be construed as tying the leaks (of emails from the DNC server) to Rich,

and his now missing laptop. Wikileaks offered a reward for information on the murder. Then Seth Rich disappeared from the conversation and Vlad Putin stepped (or was conveniently shoved) into the limelight. If this is beginning to feel like a game of Whack-a-mole played with Russian dolls, it probably is.

Fast forward to 2020; the *New York Post* published its first story on Hunter Biden's laptop just three weeks before the presidential election. Within nano-seconds, practically every newspaper in the US was trashing the story; and the *Post* was banned from posting it on social media. The *New York Times* – along with one Nina Jankowicz, in the days before she learned to hate disinformation and love the truth – said it was a Russian plot, obviously. The story died ("like a louse in a Russian's beard," as the late, great Max Wall was wont to say) and President Not Donald Trump was duly elected.

But the sound of two laptops falling down the same rabbit hole was bound to alert denizens of the Conspirasphere. Sure enough, the two stories re-emerged as conspiracy theories (Seth Rich was added to the Clinton body count; Hunter became a kind of post-Pizzagate poster boy), and there they

might have stayed; except that at least one investigative journalist in the 'real' world kept digging into the Hunter Biden story. Glenn Greenwald, erstwhile hero of the liberal intelligentsia, now vilified as a right-wing hack, kept asking awkward questions and, whether because or in spite of his persistence – or perhaps because someone at the FBI suddenly remembered they had a laptop or two in the storeroom (if only, Hunter) – the story wormed its way back up the rabbit hole.

Now some of the very media outlets that initially squashed the story are asking awkward questions too. Did Joe Biden profit directly from his son's dubious dabbling in Ukraine and China? Did Hunter use his father's name as a corrupt business card? Interesting timing too, with another election looming, war in Ukraine, and tensions with China ratcheting up.

Speaking of things that return (and interesting timing), the cryptic utterings of Q (he/she/it/they of QAnon fame) went suddenly quiet in December 2020; but on 25 June this year, a post on 8kun – "Shall we play a game once more?" – announced their return. I actually found more reports on this in the mainstream media than the conspiracy sites, which rather speaks to my theme here, in a delightfully convoluted sort of way.

Next time a news story falls off the radar, you know where to look.

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BACK FROM THE DEAD

Or not, in some cases. Our latest round-up of morgue mix-ups, premature burials and resurrections

KNOCK ON WOOD

In Peru, a horrific car crash killed Rosa Isabel Céspedes Callaca and her brother-in-law and severely injured her three children. At her funeral in Chiclayo, Callaca apparently started banging on the lid of her coffin to the horror of the assembled mourners. Cemetery administrator Juan Segundo Cajo opened the lid and found that she was breathing and had opened her eyes. Callaca was rushed to Ferreñafe Reference Hospital but could not be saved and died permanently several hours later. *boingboing.net*, 4 May 2022.

DEAD/ALIVE/DEAD

In Guaratinga, Brazil, Caroline Lopes de Almedia, 93, was found to be still alive and warm in her coffin at what was supposed to be her funeral. She was rushed back to Hospital Oswaldo Cruz, where she had been prematurely declared dead, but unfortunately, when they got there, she was found to have actually died on the way. *Metro*, 18 Oct 2021.

LADY LAZARUS

During the coronavirus outbreak in Shanghai, undertakers Wu Jianchong and Han Fei were sent to a care home to collect the body of a 75-year-old woman who had died of the virus. When they got there, the body had already been disinfected and sealed in a body bag which the two men picked up to transfer to their hearse. As they were carrying the bag, they felt the body move, so demanded that staff from the New Long March Care Home reopen the bag and check the body again. When they did so, according to a funeral home spokesperson, "Wu Jianchong removed the towel covering the face of the 'dead' and his judgement was correct; the so-called human remains were a live person." The woman was rushed to hospital, where she was reported to be in a stable condition. Wu and Han were given a £600 bonus for saving



the woman's life, but the care home director and several local officials were sacked, and the doctor who declared the woman dead had his licence revoked. *Times*, 4 May 2022.

DEFROSTED

After Srikesh Kumar was hit by a motorbike in Moradabad, near New Delhi, India, he was rushed to a private clinic in a critical condition, but was declared dead on arrival by a doctor and taken to a government hospital for a post-mortem. There, he was left in a freezer until his family arrived six hours later. "The emergency medical officer examined him. He did not find any signs of life and hence declared him dead," said Rajendra Kumar, the hospital's medical superintendent. However, he added, "When a police team and his family came over to initiate the paperwork for the autopsy, he was found alive." He was rescued from the freezer and given treatment, remaining stable, but in a coma. "This is nothing short of a miracle," said Kumar. *telegraph.co.uk/news*, 21 Nov 2021.

RESURRECTION FAIL

In 2008, Brazilian pastor Huber Carlos Rodriguez prophesied that once he died, he would be resurrected after three days,



saying that he had received the information from "divine revelations". He stipulated, "My physical integrity has to be totally preserved, since I will be dead for three days and on the third day, I will be resurrected," and even detailed the exact time of his future resurrection: 11.30 at night. When he died of Covid-19 in the city of Goiutuba in October 2021, the faithful expected him to keep his word and staged a vigil outside the funeral home where his body was being kept, playing music and singing as they awaited the prophesied resurrection. Despite pressure from sanitary authorities to bury the corpse, the funeral home followed family instructions and kept the pastor in a cold room for the required three days, but insisted on burying him one hour after the 11.30 deadline passed, although the hundreds of mourners demanded the coffin be opened to show that

ABOVE: The faithful wait in vain for Pastor Rodriguez (inset) to resurrect. LEFT: A shock was in store for mourners at the funeral of Rosa Isabel Callaca.

Rodriguez was really inside. "As a Christian, I believed that a miracle could happen. We live and learn every day. In the Bible, it is written that it is possible," said Jose Dourado, manager of the funeral home. *marketresearchtelecast.com*, 27 Oct 2021; *Metro*, 28 Oct 2021.

NOT DEAD

Sheriff's deputies in Georgia sent out to investigate reports of a body found on a trail in the Hitchiti National Forest swiftly realised that the "deceased female wearing white socks" was "actually a life-sized doll, complete with accessories". Taken back to the station and cleaned up, she has been named Selena and the Sheriff has issued a statement saying: "If you know Selena or are responsible for her whereabouts, rest assured no DNA was collected and you are safe. But in the future, please make sure to dispose of your items in a responsible way." *[UPI]* 7 Feb 2022.

For other recent returns from the grave, see FT334:10-11, 357:223, 363:12, 381:21, 386:20-21, 398:8-9.

NECROLOG

This month, we say goodbye to the bestselling alternative historian who inspired *The Da Vinci Code* and the psychic researcher behind “The Scole Experiment”



ABOVE: Henry Lincoln, mapping the mysteries of Rennes-le-Château in 2001.

HENRY LINCOLN

Best known as one of the authors of *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail* (HBHG), Henry Lincoln had a colourful career as an actor and script writer before ever venturing into the field of alternative history. He was born Henry Soskin in London in 1930, and changed his name to Lincoln when he began acting after national service, making frequent appearances on radio and TV, including in the classic 1960s series *The Avengers*, *The Saint*, *Man in a Suitcase* and *The Champions*. This led him to try his hand at scriptwriting, for which he found he had a talent. As well as being a regular writer for *Z Cars*, Lincoln also wrote or co-wrote several *Doctor Who* scripts, including 1968's *Web of Fear*, in which the long-running character Brigadier Lethbridge-Stewart was introduced.

During the 1980s Lincoln wrote and presented a number of TV documentaries such as *The Man in the Iron Mask*, *Nostradamus*, *The Curse of the Pharaohs*, and *The Cathars*, so when he came across L'Or de Rennes (“The Gold of Rennes”), a book by the surrealist poet Gerard de Sède that hinted at lost treasures and a secret society, Lincoln immediately saw its potential. Investigating de Sède's claim that a secret society, the Priory of Sion (FT101:28-31, 212:32-39), preserved a lineage of royal

blood from the Merovingians onwards to the present day, Lincoln came across several parchments that de Sède had published but not decoded. Asking him why, he got the answer “because we thought it might interest someone like you to find it for yourself”. Lincoln decoded these documents and first tackled the story in a series of documentaries for the BBC's *Chronicle* strand in 1974. He met Michael Baigent, a New Zealand photojournalist, who had been working on a project about the Knights Templar, and Richard Leigh, an American fiction writer, and they teamed up to write HBHG, which was published in 1982. Reading like a page-turning thriller, it laid out the claim that Jesus married Mary Magdalene and had children, and that these subsequently came to live in France, where their descendants founded the Merovingian royal dynasty. It also claimed the Priory of Sion preserved the knowledge of this, and that the mysteriously wealthy priest Berenger Saunier owed his fortune to this secret knowledge and had encoded clues in the church at Rennes-le-Château that would lead seekers to a mysterious treasure. Their 1986 follow-up, *The Messianic Legacy*, elaborated on the tale, and the books became key drivers of the resurgence of alternative history, as well as inspiring

many treasure hunters to comb the hills around Rennes. Lincoln returned to TV to expand on his discoveries in 1993, making a four-part series, *The Secret*, with Erling Haagenen, and later collaborated with him to write *The Templar's Secret Island*. This alleged that the Knights Templar had built the churches on the Danish island of Bornholm in a pattern enabling them to be used as a series of mediæval astronomical observatories. His last book was *Key to the Sacred Pattern*, which analysed the sacred geometry around Rennes that formed a pentacle in the landscape.

The Bishop of Birmingham denounced HBHG as “heresy”, and Lincoln's books were not welcomed by mainstream historians, who were almost uniformly dismissive. Richard Barber called HBHG “the most notorious of all the Grail pseudo-histories... which proceeds by innuendo”, while Sharan Newman said that there are no records of Templar activity in Denmark and that *The Templar's Secret Island* “is based on a few pieces of data and several assumptions that rely on inaccurate information”. One notable fan was novelist Dan Brown, who based his breakthrough bestseller *The Da Vinci Code* (FT193:32-37) on the revelations made in HBHG. When, in 2006, Baigent and Leigh sued Brown for plagiarism (FT209:4-5, 210:5), Lincoln wisely decided not to join them in the action. “He refused to have anything to do with the case, stating that Dan Brown had done them no harm at all. In fact, the success of *The Da Vinci Code* had simply served to put HBHG back in the bestsellers lists, so they should be grateful to him,” said Lincoln's son Rupert. He was vindicated when the pair lost the case and faced legal bills of £3million.

In 2003 Lincoln was awarded an Honorary Knighthood in

the Milti Templi Scotia order, in recognition of his work on sacred geometry and Templar history. Later in life he lived in a small village near Rennes-le-Château, where he died. To the end of his life Lincoln gave talks on his research and was generous in finding time for fans who visited the region.

Henry Lincoln, alternative historian; born London, 12 Feb 1930; died near Rennes-le-Château, 24 Feb 2022, aged 92.

ROBIN FOY

One of the most systematic attempts in recent years to prove the existence of life after death took place in the small Norfolk village of Scole over a five-year period in the 1990s (FT130:6, 132:22-24), with Robin Foy as its instigator. Foy's interest in the paranormal began in childhood, but he only realised he had psychic abilities during his early career in the RAF, which he had joined after initially contemplating becoming a vicar. After leaving the airforce and becoming a manager for a paper company, he became well known as a psychic researcher, taking part in many séances. During some of these he was visited by his late father, which resulted in proving the existence of life after death becoming a consuming passion.

Between 1993 and 1998, Foy, his wife Sandra and four other mediums conducted a series of séances, described as “The Scole Experiment”, in the pitch-dark basement of the Foy's farmhouse, usually in the presence of Society for Psychical Research (SPR) investigators. During the five-year experiment they believed they made extensive contact with the spirit world and produced consistent and impressive results, manifesting a wide range of phenomena including unexplained lights, voices coming from mid-air, photographs appearing on film



that had not been in a camera, videos of mysterious alien worlds, and objects teleporting. Winston Churchill's spirit became a regular visitor to the basement and Foy described his manifestations as a "constant inspiration", encouraging him to persist with his work when he felt like giving up. Foy believed that their experiences established the existence of life after death beyond doubt, and he and the group collaborated with the author Grant Solomon to set out their findings in a book, *The Scole Experiment*. He also published a detailed diary of the Scole Experiment, *Witnessing the Impossible*, and *In Pursuit of Physical Mediumship* about his wider psychical research and experiences.

The SPR investigation resulted in "The Scole Report", published in the journal *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*. This was several hundred pages long and written by three of the lead investigators who were present at the sittings, David Fontana, Arthur Ellison and Montague Keen, and while extensive and detailed, it has been criticised as deeply flawed. The SPR investigators did not apply any scientific controls to the séances, and Foy refused to allow the use of night vision equipment, both of which could have conclusively ruled out fraud. He felt night vision cameras might "frighten the spirits away". When I interviewed him in the 1990s, he told me the spirits "didn't like infrared" and seemed discomforted when I said that night vision equipment *absorbed* infrared, while humans emitted considerable amounts of it.

Foy remained frustrated that sceptics did not accept his conclusions. After the end of the experiment, he and his wife remained active in psychic circles and stayed in Scole until 2006, when they retired to Spain, where Foy died in his sleep.

Robin Foy, psychic researcher & founder of the Scole Experiment; born Blackpool, 1943; died Spain, 10 Apr 2022, aged 78.
Ian Simmons



FAIRIES, FOLKLORE AND FORTEANA

SIMON YOUNG FILES A NEW REPORT FROM THE INTERFACE OF STRANGE PHENOMENA AND FOLK BELIEF

WELL, I NEVER...

The year is about 1820 and William Butterfield is walking up, in the pre-dawn, to his work at Ilkley. He owns the White Wells, the springs on the edge of the moorland, which are believed to have healing qualities. Ilkley folk and, increasingly, health tourists are arriving to try their luck in the freezing cold waters that run off the sodden heather.

Cresting the hill, Butterworth has what fortune-tellers sometimes call an 'oz' moment. The bird song sounds unusually 'sweet'. Shrugging the impression off, he puts his key in the lock at the walled open bath – but the lock does not work. Even after getting the lock to turn, it is a struggle to get the door open: it is almost as if *something* is pushing against him.

And what does he see when the door finally gives way?

"All over the well, skimming on its surface like water-spiders, or dipping into it as if they were taking a bath, was a swarm of little people, the biggest of them not above 18 inches [46cm] high; yet they seemed perfect human beings. They bathed with all their clothes on; and Butterfield noticed that they were dressed from head to foot in green." The fairies took one look at Butterfield and chased off, running up and over an eight-foot (2.4m) wall.

Butterfield's encounter is a fortune classic, though perhaps we should not be too trusting. After all, it was written down by two separate authors who were telling us of the events of that day, at third-hand, 50 years after Butterworth had his brush with the impossible.

However, fairy springs and fairy wells

remain, through the centuries, some of the best places to see fairies, at least in Britain. Most fairy sites in England, Scotland and Wales are found far from human habitation: there is the pastoral human sphere and the wild fairy realms. Fairy wells are different. They are often on the very edge of villages, as if they constitute a shared resource, a meeting place between the human world and the world of fairy beyond. This may have been the case at Ilkley too. Not only did the well have healing

qualities, but the band of moorland beyond had several fairy sites, including the Fairies' Kirk (or church), a rocky outcrop where we must assume the fairies prayed to their fairy god(s).

Then there is another reason that Butterfield should not have been surprised to see his fairy neighbours. His adventures took place on 24 June, just as the Sun was rising, the end of the most fairy time of the year, Midsummer Night.

Simon's latest book is *The Boggart* (Exeter University Press, 2022).

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UAPs: threats or wild geese?

NIGEL WATSON listens to the latest ufological debates from Congress and an online conference

UAPs IN CONGRESS

The House Intelligence Committee Hearing on 17 May 2022 was a milestone in UFO history. André Carson, chairman of the House Intelligence Counterterrorism, Counterintelligence and Counterproliferation Subcommittee, said its intention was to bring the subject out of the shadows and to give it respectability; thereby, pilots and other witnesses should be more willing to report their experiences and not fear scepticism or ridicule.

It was revealed that the Navy's UAP Task Force had collected 400 reports including historical cases. Ronald Moultrie, Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence and Security, said they are taking a data-driven approach that will standardise reporting to enhance statistical analysis and identification techniques. Subject matter experts and all relevant government agencies will also be used to better understand the data.

One of the main concerns is that the US might be suddenly confronted by a highly advanced technological surprise that would threaten national security. This might be the product of foreign enemy powers, but the Committee is open to all hypotheses.

Both Moultrie and Scott Bray, Deputy Director of Naval Intelligence, pointed out the fleeting nature of sightings by US military pilots and showed a cockpit video of a fast moving UAP that was hard to explain. Commodore (R) Rubén Lianza, Director of Argentina's Center for Aero-Space Identification (CIAE), using computer software, identified it as a helium balloon. Bray was able to explain videos of green triangular objects as resulting from UAPs (stars?) being filmed through night vision goggles by an SLR camera. It was admitted that some sightings were of UAPs that showed exceptional flight characteristics and seemed to be physical objects. In response to questions about the US Government possessing UAP fragments, the notorious Admiral Wilson memo and UAP sightings near ICBM sites, any knowledge was denied. Bray and Moultrie looked as if they had not heard of such instances, and seemed unaware of the wider history of UFOs.

The ever sceptical and sensible Robert Sheaffer, regarded the 'unexplainable' video they showed as being insignificant and, if it was the best evidence they had, laughable. He told space.com that this was a wild goose chase and mocked the Navy's claims: "We need more sensors! We need more databases! We need more staff! And since the goose will forever escape us, the investigative gravy train will have a long run."



LEFT: US Deputy Director of Naval Intelligence Scott Bray shows a UAP video to the House Intelligence Committee.

UFO fan Jaime Maussan (what were they thinking?!).

The first 'Reveal 1' session showed the footage of three UAPs filmed by the infrared targeting/imaging system of an Apache helicopter on 6 November 2018, 40 miles (64km) northwest of

Most commentators, however, have approved the no-nonsense approach to the subject, and think this research might lead to a better understanding of UAPs. Meanwhile, others think the bigging-up of a 'threat' is part of a US Government propaganda campaign. Contactee Terry Tibando, for example, states that "the public should be aware that this is nothing more than the Pentagon/military trying to rewrite the UFO narrative! For decades, the public has blindly accepted the official position of these government service branches without doing their own independent research into the UFI/ETI phenomenon. If they had, they will see the blatant discrepancy and disinformation being perpetrated in an ongoing propaganda campaign of deception!"

From a national security angle, it is obviously a good idea to track and identify enemy drones. Yet, much of this has been driven by people with an explicit ET/paranormal interest in the subject who yearn for 'DISCLOSURE'. Will they ever be satisfied? No, of course not.

Another point is that the USAF has been silent on this matter. I also wonder if many of these so-called 'tic-tac' UAPs are the product of artefacts created by sensors and computer systems, in the same way there were so many radar UFO cases in the early days of ufology (see **FT403:40-47**) that have virtually vanished as the technology has improved.

Subcommittee Hearing on Unidentified Aerial Phenomena at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=aSDweUbGBow; www.space.com/future-ufo-research-after-congress-hearing; www.uapsg.com/2022/05/solved-mysterious-object-that-aoimsg.html

UFO DISCLOSURE SYMPOSIUM

This was a physical and online conference held at Vernal, Utah, from 27-29 May 2022. The line-up of speakers and panellists included Professor Avi Loeb, F-18 pilot Chris Lehto and Mexican television personality and

Tucson, Arizona. Analysis seemed to show there were moving objects inside the orbs as they erratically darted about the sky. Dr Travis S Taylor acknowledged that there was insufficient information to say for certain what these objects were and that they could have been a natural phenomenon like ball lightning or birds, or even a new phenomenon.

Andy Marcial pointed out that highly trained people have filmed UAP footage and it is disrespectful to think they can mistake birds for UAPs. Another panellist, pilot Chris Lehto, said we should not start from the assumption that something is not possible and that we should study the data. His view was that the UAPs in this case were not birds, and by studying the data he found that if they were one mile away they were travelling at a speed of from .48 mach (368mph/592km/h) to 1.28 mach (982mph/1,580km/h). Video expert Dave Falch confirmed that the footage did not show birds, balloons or drones.

Avi Loeb agreed this was an intriguing UAP video, but the Apache equipment was not sophisticated enough to determine what was filmed. In order for science and the public to understand what is going on, he recommended deploying a 'cheap' \$200,000 suite of equipment to look for UAPs linked with AI to detect and analyse any anomaly. He promised, if enough were distributed, we might get better answers in a year or two.

The main mantra of the conference was that such things should not be dismissed and ridiculed or approached with a closed mind. What we need is more information, data and analysis. The frustrating thing is that scientific data has been collected by the likes of Project Twinkle (1949), Project Identification (1973) and Project Hessdalen (1983 onwards). Despite their best attempts the 'phenomenon' has proved elusive. Will the latest UAP research learn from the lessons of the past and pin down the UAP enigma?

<https://ufodisclosuresymposium.com>



Close Encounters of the Royal Kind



JENNY RANGLES celebrates the Queen's Jubilee by pondering Royal connections to the UFO mystery

Last month Britain celebrated an unprecedented event: the 70th anniversary of a monarch's ascension to the throne. While in Britain's constitutional monarchy the Queen has limited say in the actual running of the country, people have long wondered how much she actually knows about any real state secrets – the most relevant here being to do with UFOs as investigated covertly by the Ministry of Defence or other bodies.

In the USA, the President is elected, just as is the Prime Minister in the UK, and each will be briefed on events they may have no prior knowledge of and told why they, like most others, were kept in the dark. But in the UK the Queen has seen off Prime Ministers from Churchill onwards. Regardless of whether any big secrets have been withheld from these men and women across seven decades, the Queen has a continuity of knowledge not otherwise seen in either the US or the UK. So, if there *are* secrets to be told about an alien presence on Earth, Elizabeth Windsor would probably be in the unique position of being the only person in the world to have known about them for such a long period – most of her adult life. Of course, the Queen being the Queen, is famously discreet; she was hardly going to sell an exclusive to the tabloids.

Do we have any hints of what might have been disclosed? Well, not from the Queen herself, obviously; however, in 2009, when the MoD stopped collating UFO reports, one long-classified file revealed a letter sent to Her Majesty asking her to take UFOs seriously as a security matter; the reply from the Palace stated, rather amusingly, that the Queen could not intervene in such an event as a possible alien invasion.

However, her family are another matter. Prince Charles has a longstanding fascination with subjects that would be at home in *FT*, so you'd imagine he would be curious about UFO events. Indeed, in 1983, when Arthur Koestler left £1 million to set up an academic study into the paranormal at a UK University, Charles intervened and attempted to persuade the University of Aberystwyth, of which he was Chancellor, to take on the role. Sadly, they did not do so, and indeed many prestigious universities declined the money, which eventually saw a programme set up at the University of Edinburgh (see **FT201:32-39, 224:58-59**).

So the Royals are no strangers to paranormal matters; I know for a fact that Prince Phillip was interested in the UFO mystery (**FT406:18-19**). Half a century ago, I

The reply from the Palace stated that the Queen could not intervene in an alien invasion

worked for several years for Charles Bowen, then editor of *Flying Saucer Review (FSR)* magazine. I wrote articles, did paperwork and was made aware that the Prince had long been interested in the subject and read the magazine – though I was advised that this was kept secret at his request; understandably, as the media would not have used this knowledge in a helpful way.

Philip's interest appears to have emerged via his Uncle, Lord Louis Mountbatten, who fought in WWII and was the last Viceroy of India before Independence, and who appears to have had a close encounter on his estate at Broadlands in Hampshire on 25 February 1955. That morning, there was light snow on the ground as a worker cycled towards the house and got off his bike to observe a hovering object, like a metal spinning top with 'portholes', floating only yards away above a bank leading toward a stream. The witness watched in awe as a tube emerged from the base of the object with a small being on it, heading for the ground. As if suddenly aware of his proximity, a light glowed inside the object and an unseen wave of energy emerged and hit the witness, causing him to drop his bike and fall to the ground. He was left there, weak and unable to move for some minutes, as the object flew away. Slowly, he regained the ability to stand, and then continued to the house to report what had happened.

It was soon after this event that Lord Mountbatten, and eventually Prince Phillip, started to read the then new *FSR* – which they were still doing 20 years later when I was working there. Indeed, there are some who think this is linked to the story told a few weeks later (23 May 1955) by US journalist Dorothy Kilgallen. According to Kilgallen, she was told at a London society cocktail party that the UK Government had recovered a crashed UFO – and from what they had found it had been manned by small beings less than 4ft (1.2m) tall. One source suggested that the origin of the story – which Kilgallen never confirmed – was Lord Mountbatten. We will probably never know

how true any of this is, or if it was linked to the events at Romsey three months earlier.

Ironically, I have my own cocktail party story to tell – although it dates from many years later. I happened to be at an event where a former Lord Mayor of London was in attendance. He had known Mountbatten, who, he assured me, had revealed to him that the UK Government had indeed captured the remains of a downed unknown craft that Mountbatten was told was alien in origin. It had been secreted away to an airbase in Wales for study. I never did find out how true this yarn was. Nor, indeed, if the person telling it to me actually believed it, although he seemed to. But I did get a chance to meet other members of the Establishment in December 1980 when I was invited to give a briefing in Westminster to the House of Lords Study Group.

What was very clear from that remarkable day was the level of interest in the UFO mystery among the Establishment. There were multiple members of both the Lords and the Commons listening to what I had to say, including a party leader and an ex-Prime Minister. It certainly surprised me, given the niche and controversial nature of what I was talking about. A major defence source was also present, and questions were asked of me that suggested there was at least a suspicion that not everything that was happening out there was being revealed, even to those working within the Ministry of Defence itself. There were no tales of crashed UFOs or the capture of alien bodies – just genuine interest in a subject the media would have considered crackpot had I told of these events.

This session fell in the middle of the four weeks in 1980 that saw perhaps the two most famous cases in British UFO history, both of which I was closely involved with. The Alan Godfrey abduction in Todmorden (**FT325:27, 326:27, 327:29, 328:28-30**) was only days old, and just two weeks after I addressed the Lords group there followed an even more famous close encounter in Rendlesham Forest (**FT336:24-25, 337:28-29, 338:26-27, 339:26-27, 340:28-29**).

Sadly, on 27 August 1979, Lord Louis Mountbatten had died in Ireland, killed by an IRA terrorist bomb; so I never got the chance to ask the man himself about what happened in 1955. I was in London with my co-writer Peter Hough doing interviews promoting our first book – *UFOs: A British Viewpoint* – against the backdrop of ongoing reports about this terrible tragedy.

DRIVEN MAD BY THE GREAT SEA SERPENT

THE STRANGE CASE OF

GEORGE DREVAR

CHARLES PAXTON uncovers the eventful life of a Victorian merchant captain, would-be murderer, cryptozoological monomaniac, evangelist, inventor and hero.

In May 1881, a rather curious case came before the Central Criminal Court (the Old Bailey) in London. Merchant captain George “Drevor” was accused of sending threatening letters to the Commissioner of Wreck (the British official responsible for investigating shipwrecks of British merchant vessels), Mr Henry Cadogan Rothery. Drevor had been captain and part owner of the *Norfolk*, which had stranded on Hartwell Reef in the Cape Verde Islands in July 1878. It appears there was a series of unfortunate events in which a mistake in navigation was made, currents were overlooked, the ship’s cargo of groundnuts somehow blocked the pumps, and in order to man them the lookout was taken from his primary duty, leading to the boat colliding with the reef. In October 1879, the Commissioner of Wreck clearly stated “Drevor”, along with the second officer, who appeared to have had an alcohol problem, was responsible for the shipwreck. Drevor/Drevar’s captain’s license was suspended for six months.

Drevor (for that was his real name) seems to have strongly resented the outcome of the enquiry, which he regarded as unfair, but this was not his sole bone of contention with the Commissioner. “Some evidence was given showing that the prisoner believed in the existence of the sea serpent, and the prisoner himself stated that his conduct had been partly caused by the insults he had received from Mr Rothery, because Drevar, in his own words “was doing the Almighty’s work in making his wonders known”. Drevar’s belief in the great sea-serpent is not alluded to in the Commissioner’s report, so it is unclear in what context Rothery brought up the matter of the sea serpent.

Drevar was clearly under great strain in this period, possibly acerbated by the fact the *Norfolk* was uninsured. He proceeded to unwisely harass the Commissioner by



LEFT: George Drevar and his unsinkable “water velocipede”.

BELOW LEFT: The *Norfolk*, sunk in the Cape Verde Islands in 1878.

sending letters that apparently threatened Rothery with murder as well as calling him “an unfeeling brute” and a “modern Jesuit”. Naturally, such activities came to the attention of the police, and in April 1881 Drevar was remanded in custody by none other than Inspector Donald Swanson of Scotland Yard who would, but a few years later, lead the investigation into Jack the Ripper.

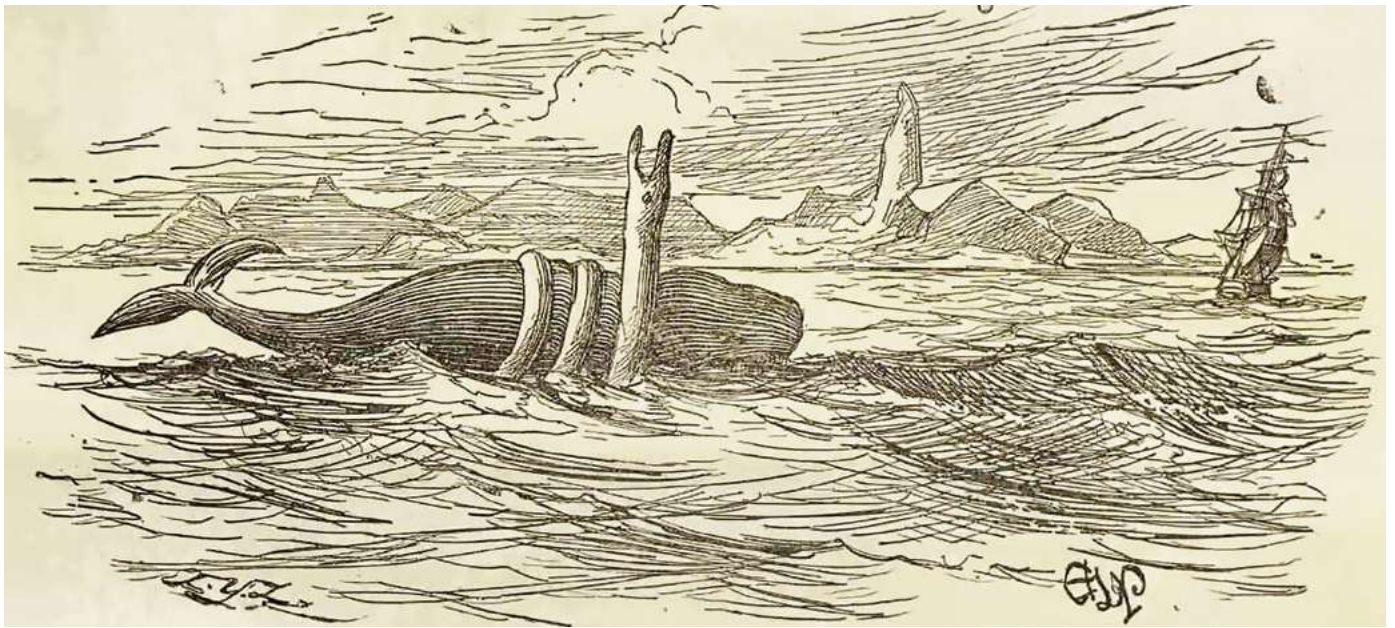
Upon his arrest, Drevar drew attention to some pamphlets about the sea serpent as well as a small sea snake in a bottle. He had collected a number of “sea serpents” (from their description, presumably sea snakes) on his travels and was so taken with them that when the *Norfolk* sank, his priority was to procure some rum from another shipwrecked vessel nearby – not to imbibe, but to preserve his collection.

When the “sea serpent monomaniac”, as he was described by some newspapers, finally came to trial, the defending barrister admitted a variety of witnesses to Drevar’s good character and by way of defence argued that it was Drevar’s belief in the existence of the sea serpent and the



“EVIDENCE WAS SHOWN THAT HE BELIEVED IN THE EXISTENCE OF THE SEA SERPENT”

incredulity with which it was received, the loss of the ship, his sense of injustice over the wreck report and his financial ruination that had led to “his mind [becoming] temporarily unhinged”. The defence further argued that his intention with regard to the letters was purely to gain publicity for his plight rather than actual intent to inflict harm. As to the sea serpent, the defence admitted that



ABOVE: Navy chaplain EL Penny's drawing of the *Pauline* encounter as it appeared in the *Illustrated London News* on 20 November 1875. BELOW: Drevar's own sketches of the sea serpent from the *Graphic*.

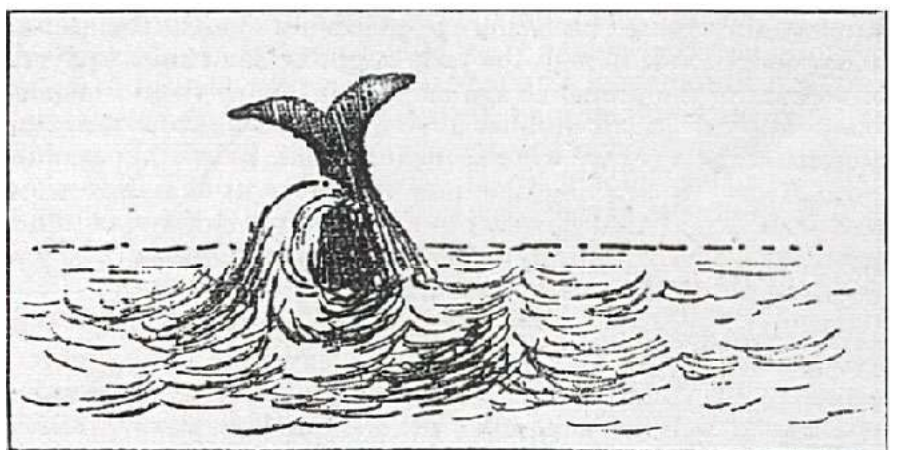
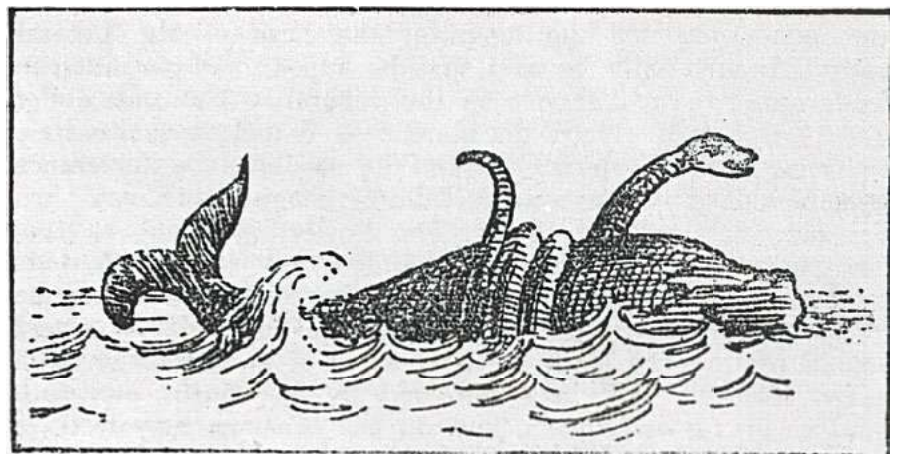
Drevar "been suffering under a delusion respecting its existence but regards all other matters he was quite sane."

In sentencing the accused, Mr Justice Denman (who commented that he had been at college with Rothery!), accepted that Drevar was a person of high character, but that threatening the Commissioner, who had a "kind and tender regard for those that came under his jurisdiction", really had to be punished. So Drevar was sent down for three months, fortunately without hard labour. A newspaper commented: "Captain Drevar [sic] was an able man of excellent character, who had many successful voyages until he went wrong on sea-serpents... he was a religious man; but once his religion got mixed up with sea serpents there was no chance for him."

MONSTERMANIA

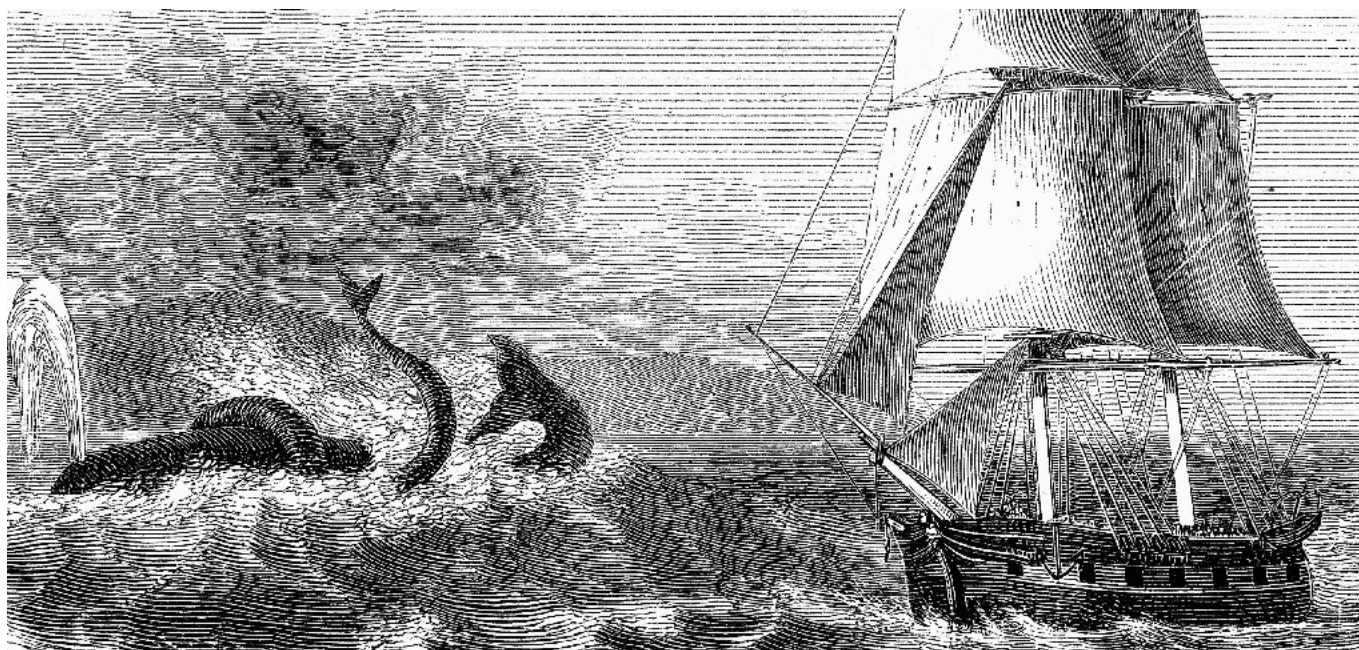
But if Drevar was obsessed with sea serpents perhaps he had good reason to be, because he had fallen in with a sea-serpent not once but apparently on two occasions. He was actually a witness to one of the most famous sea serpent cases on record when the barque *Pauline* (Drevar being the master), en route to Zanzibar with a cargo of coal, saw the great sea-serpent at Cape San Roque, Brazil, in 1875. Drevar recorded the following account.

On July 8, 1875, in lat. 5° 13 N, long. 55W, Cape San Roque north-east coast of Brazil, bearing W.S.W., distance about 20 miles [32km], at 11 A.M., the weather fine and clear, wind and sea moderate, about one-half mile [800m] to windward, we observed some black spots on the water, and a whitish pillar, about 30 feet [9m] high, above them. The sea was also splashing up fountain-like several hundred yards around them. At first glance I thought they were breakers, and the pillar a pinnacle rock bleached with the sun; but the pillar fell with a splash, and rose and fell frequently.



Good glasses showed me that it was a monster sea snake coiled twice around the body of a large sperm whale, the head and tail part of the snake, each about 30 feet long forming a lever, crushing its victim to death with each revolution, and appearing, as each proportion alternatively rose in the air, like the arms of some gigantic windmill, and about the same speed

as it would do in a fresh breeze. They both sank about every two minutes, remaining that time under water, and then coming to the surface, both still revolving. The struggle of the whale, and two other whales near at hand lashing the water frantic with excitement, made the sea in their vicinity like a boiling cauldron, and the confused noise was distinctly heard. The struggle



ABOVE: Another view of a fight between a whale and a sea serpent. BELOW: An account of the *Pauline* encounter from the *Sydney Evening News*, 12 Oct 1895.

lasted about fifteen minutes and finished with the tail portion of the whale elevated straight into the air, waving backwards and forwards, and the tail furiously lashing the water in the last death struggle as it disappeared from our view, and, sinking down head foremost, no doubt was soon gorged at the monster's leisure and the huge mouthful may at this moment be in the process of digestion, and the monster of monsters in a dormant state. Two of the largest sperm whales I have seen came slowly towards of vessel, their bodies were more than usually elevated out of the water. They were not blowing or making a noise, but seemed quite paralysed from the fearful sight; indeed a cold shiver passed through my frame on witnessing the last agonising struggle of the poor whale, which seemed as helpless in the coils of the serpent as a small bird in the talons of the hawk. Allowing for the two turns around the whale, I think the snake was about 160 feet [49m] long and seven or eight feet [2 to 2.4m] in the girth. In colour and shape it was like a conger eel. The First and Second Mates and half of the Crew were observers, and I intend, with them, to appear before some authority and testify on the oath the above statement is true.

I am aware that few believe in the existence of the great sea serpent. People think that it should be oftener seen by the numerous vessels always on the ocean; but the north coast Brazil, noted for its monster reptiles, is also particularly adapted to the growth of sea monsters. It is in mid-torrid zone; the temperature of the water and air seldom below 81 deg; the shore for a thousand miles is bordered by a coral wall for Recife, and numerous banks or reefs lie a considerable distance off the land... It may also be allowed that the serpent retains some portion of cunning mentioned in the Scriptures; at least, he shows with enough not to leave a secure home and go meandering about the oceans like other fish, to be captured and tortured for

“A COLD SHIVER PASSED THROUGH MY FRAME ON WITNESSING THE STRUGGLE”

The Sea-Serpent.

It is about time the sea serpent re-appeared. In July, 1875, Captain Drevar, of the barque *Pauline*, testified before a magistrate, together with his officers and crew, that they had witnessed a fight between a sea serpent and a whale in lat. 5 deg. south, long. 35 deg. west. A monster sea serpent was seen coiled twice round a large sperm whale; his head and tail parts, each about 30ft long, acting as levers, and twisting itself and victim around with great velocity. They sank out of sight about every two minutes, coming to the surface still revolving, and the struggles of the whale and two other whales that were near, frantic with excitement, made the sea in this vicinity like a boiling cauldron, and a loud and confused noise was distinctly heard. This strange occurrence lasted some fifteen minutes, and finished with the tail portion of the whale being elevated straight in the air, then waving backwards and forwards, and lashing the water furiously in the last death struggle, when the whole body disappeared from our view, going down head foremost towards the bottom, where, no doubt, it was gorged at the serpent's leisure. . . . Allowing for two coils round the whale, I think the serpent was about 160ft or 170ft long, and 7ft or 8ft in girth. It was in color much like a congor eel, and the head, from the mouth being always open, appeared the largest part of the body. —London paper.

men's pleasure or profit. No doubt San Roque is a good feeding ground, it being a landmark for whales leaving the south for the North Atlantic and the warm currents suitable for breeding. (Punctuation etc. from original).

This initial encounter would be illustrated twice – once by the Navy chaplain of *HMS London* in Zanzibar under the direction of Drevar (appearing in the *Illustrated London News*) and later by Drevar himself in the *Graphic* newspaper.

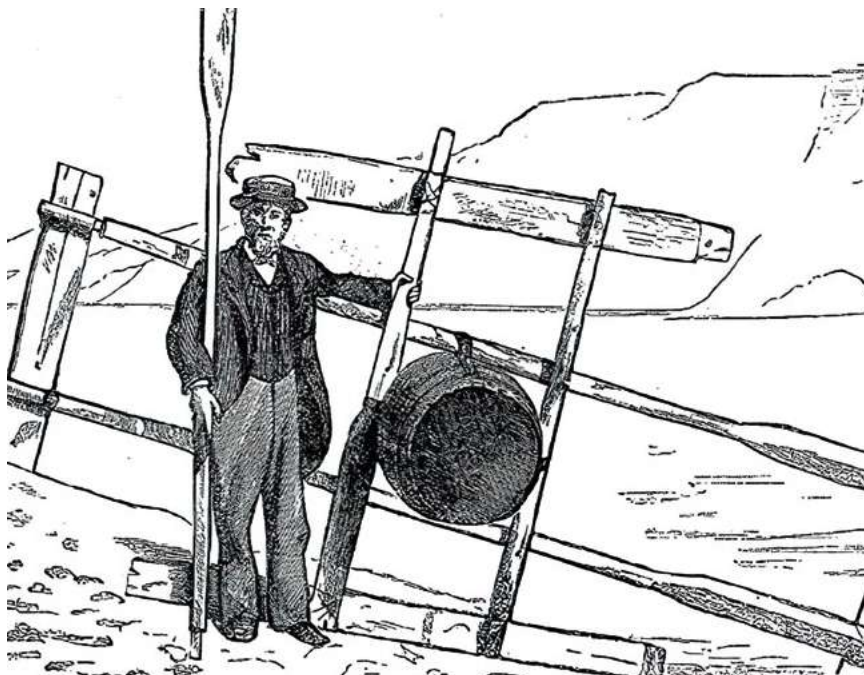
A few days later Drevar would see the sea serpent again, this time without the sperm whales, and it would be seen later by his crew without him again: “On July 13 this or another sea-serpent was again seen, about 200 yards [180m] of the stern of the vessel, shooting itself along the surface, 40ft [12m] of its body being out of the water at a time. Again on the same day, it was seen once more, with its body standing quite perpendicular out of the water to the height of 60ft [18m]. This time it seemed as if determined to attack the vessel and the crew and officers armed themselves for self-defence.”

Subsequent zoological comment on what Drevar reported varied. The descriptions are a little contradictory. The serpent was a white pillar, but also dark above and similar in colour to a conger eel, which is countershaded (coloured dark on the dorsal surface and lighter on the ventral surface). If the *Pauline* was 20 miles (32km) off Cape Sao Roque, it might have been just over the continental shelf edge in the deep waters of the South Atlantic; therefore, the sperm whale could have been feeding on the giant squid *Architeuthis*. The coils of the sea serpent would be the arms or tentacles of *Architeuthis*. This would be reconcilable with the “arms of a gigantic windmill”. However, the tentacles of *Architeuthis* do not reach a length of 150ft (46m). Alternatively, the

witnesses might have seen the “amours of two whales” (as suggested by the naturalists Henry Lee and Richard Owen), such that the serpent was actually the pectorals of the whales intertwined. Possibly the whales were mating and the serpent was in fact a sperm whale penis (or penises), which can take on a light colour (see FT200:16, 409:5). The equator is a sperm whale breeding ground. This would also explain the tail lashing the sea as a courtship display. Mating behaviour might also explain why the whales were “frantic with excitement”. Others have suggested it was a sperm whale entrapped in fishing gear or some other debris, but this otherwise plausible hypothesis does not really explain the tail slapping nor necessarily the “excitement” of the other whales. A more exotic suggestion was made by Searles V Wood in the pages of *Nature*: that the sea serpent was a zeuglodon (*Basilosaurus*), a prehistoric extinct elongate whale. Wood corresponded with Drevar, but Drevar was unconvinced: “Capt. Drevar rejects with disdain my suggestion that the animal was not a serpent.”

More precisely, Drevar seems to have believed the *Pauline* serpent was a literal giant sea snake of the Hydrophidæ family of tropical sea snakes. The Hydrophidæ are not, of course, constricting snakes but instead poisonous ones. No constricting serpent could successfully suffocate an animal like a sperm whale. An animal that could stick a 60ft neck out of the water would have to have a substantial mass of body within the water to prevent tipping over.

However the zoological affinities of the sea serpent were of less importance to Drevar than the religious implications. These are made clear in his 1889 booklet where he explicitly relates the sea serpent to the



Leviathan of the book of Job, dismissing any theologians who said this was a whale. Drevar thought the existence of sea serpents was vindication of Scripture: “I sincerely believe that God for some wise purpose, has been pleased to reveal this greatest wonder of animated nature to me”.

DREVAR'S VELOCIPEDE

Whatever was seen, Drevar's mania with sea monsters was born, and the road to the Old Bailey and ultimately imprisonment was opened. However, being imprisoned did not diminish Drevar's enthusiasm for sea serpents and he continued to write letters and pamphlets in their favour.

Happily, after his release he wisely concentrated on his other great obsession: inventing life-saving gear. Motivated by his Cape Verde experience and an earlier shipwreck in 1870, he had invented, among other things, a lifesaving raft which could be built rapidly from a cask barrel surrounded by oars. After a period of convalescence, he advertised his lifesaving inventions at the Great International Fisheries Exhibition held in London in the summer of 1883, where he won an award.

Thus it was that in September 1883, Drevar, along with fellow exhibitor “Professor Ward”, a swimming instructor, teamed up to produce a demonstration of their lifesaving



TOP: Drevar and his barrel cask lifesaving device – made from a barrel, boat oars and bits of timber – in an illustration of 1881. It was a practical solution to making a raft from the available materials on board ship. **ABOVE:** A model of Drevar's lifesaving raft on display in the Museum of Applied Arts & Sciences, Sydney, Australia.

MAAS



ABOVE: "Experiments with novel life-saving apparatus at Dover", showing Drevar in his water velocipede, Professor Ward in the lifesaving barrel cask raft and plucky nine-year-old Master Ward. BELOW: Drevar kept up a regular newspaper correspondence concerning his pet subject; this letter is from the *Queenslander*, 29 Aug 1885.

gear at Dover. It is from this event we have our only pictures of Drevar. The apparent plan was for nine-year-old Alfred Ward, supported by a cork buoyancy device, to paddle across the Channel, impervious to the cold by virtue of his father's insulated costume, accompanied by his father in a boat and Drevar in his "water velocipede", a sort of hand-powered pedalo. The team arrived at Dover on 6 September and after a few days' delay attempted a crossing on 8 September despite inclement wind conditions. Poor Ward junior swallowed water and was seasick, but the team intended to recommence their activities the next day. The plucky master Ward did finally make a voyage from Dover to Folkestone on 12 September.

Drevar seems to have set off later, against the advice of locals, in order to join the Wards at Folkestone, but broke down halfway and was initially feared lost; thankfully, he was picked up by a steamer the next day. He was met with "anything but a cordial reception" upon landing. Some newspapers, perhaps in a sly dig, commented that the velocipede was "worked by cranks". At this point, the Wards, perhaps wisely, gave up.

But Drevar, in contrast, was made of sterner stuff. He first tried to cross again on 2 October, but was "beaten back by the surf". Undeterred, he tried again on 5 October, "in opposition to the advice of his friends", but nearly sank and was picked up by a fishing boat. But he was not done. On 22 October he made his final attempt to, in his own words, "show what British pluck can do". This voyage was quite an adventure:

By two o'clock in the morning I was half-way across the Channel... I had an umbrella, which I set as a sail, but the wind blew it inside out... Afterwards I passed several vessels and saw people looking at me through glasses, but I made no signals of distress. The weather having improved slightly, I had begun to hope that I might make land on some port of the

"I HAD AN UMBRELLA SET AS A SAIL, BUT THE WIND BLEW IT INSIDE OUT"



Sea Serpents.

MR. GEORGE DREVAR writes to us from Mackay, under date 9th August:—

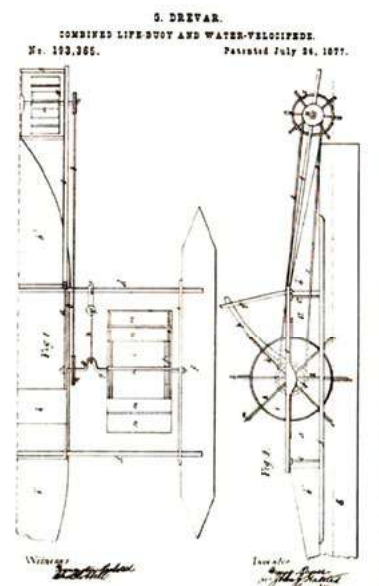
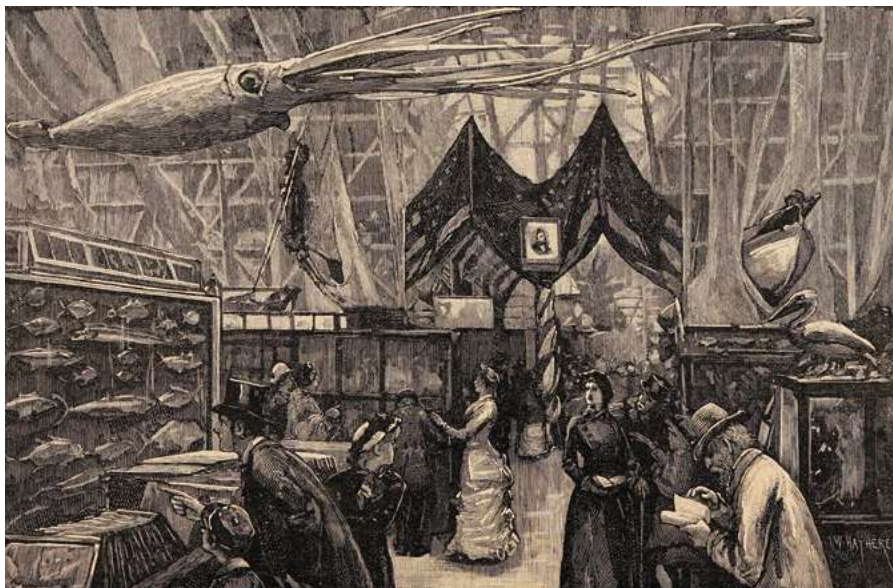
"I read in your journal of 1st instant Dr. Ellison's lecture on snakes, and his remarks about the 'fabulous' sea-serpent. It is the conviction of many that incredulity does as much mischief in the world as over credulity. I heard an infidel say that he wished the evidence about miracles was as well established and as reasonable for belief as that of great sea-serpents. I, with the officers and crew of the barque Pauline, made a solemn declaration in a court of justice in 1877 of the conflict between a sperm whale and a huge serpent, in which the whale was as helpless in the coils of the monster as a bird in the talons of a hawk. The chief interest in the great sea-serpent to me is that it fully answers the description of Leviathan sublimely described in the book of Job.

"It is significant that in the revised version of the old Bible 'great whales' is changed for 'sea monsters.' I could easily fill a volume with letters I have had from captains of the Royal Navy, and other reliable people, that have seen the great unknown; and I feel sure that the able article on the sea-serpent by Dr. Macaulay, in the February number of the 'Leisure Hour,' 1883, would convince anyone. It concludes thus: 'From the authorities and opinions cited it is evident that the time has passed when the great sea-serpent can be merely treated as a matter of merriment. When so treated by newspaper writers, and in light conversation, it is from sheer ignorance of what men of science have written.' Dr. Lee also concludes an article by saying: 'I hope that no truthful observer will be deterred from reporting such an occurrence by fear of the disbelief of naturalists or the ridicule of witlings.'"

A CORRESPONDENT from Herberston forwards a flv. somewhat like a diminutive "March flv."

Continent... At that time the waves were more boisterous than I had ever seen in all my travels. I was about two hours struggling hard to keep the boat clear of water, and at last a heavy sea – I should think quite 14 feet [4m] high – came right down on the top of her. Still I stuck to her, but knowing it was useless to try to bale her out, I sat in her stern and kept the bow out of the water – the only way to keep her at all steady. I saw many passing ships, but they did not seem to come near me. A feeling of exhaustion came over me, and I began to think my last experiment was over, and to give myself up for lost. I must have become delirious at times, for I seemed to be speaking to men all round me when there were none. I had been for nine hours continually saturated with water... at nine o'clock I saw the German barque coming down on me, I had then lost my fog-horn, and could not signal. As the water from the barque's bow crashed against my boat I went on one side, and those on board saw me. They threw me a line, but I could not catch it. I shouted out that I was dying. They attempted to lower a boat, but the ship seemed to go right away. The captain put about, and came back close to me. Seeing that the vessel was then going five knots an hour. I jumped out of my boat, and clung to a line which they threw over the boat, but I misjudged my strength, and slipped back into the sea. I thought I was done for, as I could not swim nor catch the rope, but two came down the side of the ship in a bow-line, and passing a rope under me, hauled me on deck. They wished to stand me on my head to let the water out, but to this I objected, and they carried me to the cabin, and showed me the greatest kindness. When passing Dover they sent me ashore..."

The newspapers were somewhat scathing. The *Globe* said his attempt "looks like a deliberate evasion of the law against suicide" and further described it as "ludicrously foolhardy". Drevar finally stated he would not try again after the failure of the second attempt. By this time the humour magazine



ABOVE LEFT: The International Fisheries Exhibition of 1883, where Drevar's life-saving inventions won an award; note the model of a giant squid. ABOVE RIGHT: An 1877 patent drawing for Drevar's "combined life-buoy and water-velocipede". BELOW: Drevar's death reported in the *Australian Town and Country Journal*, 11 Jan 1890.

Punch had suggested "Drevarication" should be a synonym for foolhardiness. Drevar himself complained he had only received "abuse and advice" and the cask and velocipede had been stolen. Yet he remained optimistic: "I have the quiet conviction that the world will one day acknowledge the importance of my 'help yourself' life-saving gear, and duly appreciate the risk and sacrifice I made in proving that my gear is all that I claim for it."

Ever confident, Drevar would later write that his Channel adventures had "proven" the safety of his inventions.

AUSTRALIAN ADVENTURES

Drevar and his (presumably long-suffering) wife Ann (of whom nothing is known) then made their way to Australia on board the steamboat *Dorunda*. This trip appears to be mired in controversy because there was a paucity of freshwater between Gravesend and Malta. Drevar brought a private suit against the captain, AR Sayers, for being in breach of the Passenger's Act. Although Drevar's complaint was corroborated by another passenger, it was refuted by the ship's doctor. The defendant's lawyer suggested Drevar's suit was motivated by some grievance about the cost of passage. The case was ultimately dismissed. The police-magistrate was quoted as saying it was "completely monstrous that people should bring such cases before the bench".

The Drevars settled in Sydney, where Drevar rented out his cask rafts and velocipedes to people in Centennial Park for paddling as part of the amusements. Here, he was a popular man, and in addition to running his amusements in the lake he also gave talks on marine life – presumably including the great sea serpent.

Sometime in 1888-1889, he became skipper of the *Saucy Lass*, which made a trip

The Centennial Park Fatality.

The City Coroner held an inquest at the South Sydney Morgue, on January 2, on the body of George Drevar, who was drowned in No. 6 Dam, Centennial Park, on January 1. Evidence was given that the deceased was a master mariner, 54 years of age, and a married man. He was a man of strictly temperate habits. For the past three or four weeks he had been letting for hire what he called "life-saving boats," which consisted of casks, fixed with certain appliances. James Martin, a lad, who stated he was living with his parents in Trickett-street, Woollahra, gave evidence that he saw the deceased on Wednesday morning near a pond in the Centennial Park, where he had a boat made of a cask, which he lent to a boy named Hopkins. That boy got into the boat, and went out on the pond. The boat upset, and threw Hopkins into the water. The deceased rushed into the water with all his clothes on, and swam out to Hopkins, whom he lifted up, and he then called out, "Help, help!" He then let go of the boy, and sank; he came to the surface a little while after, and then sank again, and was not seen again until the body was recovered from the water. Hopkins managed to paddle about, and keep himself afloat until he was rescued. The body of the deceased was afterward recovered by Robert Watts, a dealer, who dived for it. A verdict of accidental death was recorded.

from Sydney to the Solomon Islands in July 1889, before returning as a passenger on the *Edith May* in September. Interesting light is shed on Drevar's reliability as a witness in a correspondence in the *Australian Star*. The *Saucy Lass* arrived in the Solomons after a massacre of some settlers. Drevar shed some light on the events of the attack after hearing an account from another merchant captain, in addition to calling for intervention by the New South Wales authorities. He then spent two "very pleasant" weeks paddling around the islands in a self-made canoe prior to getting passage to Australia on the *Edith May*. A subsequent correspondent, Hubert Jessop, attacked the accuracy of the piece and declared, presumably without irony, not knowing Drevar's history: "I would say his geographical description is very far from right, and, I am afraid, were his calculations at sea one quarter so incorrect he would soon

find himself a subject for a Marine Board Enquiry." However, Jessop's actual corrections to Drevar's account seem quite minor given Drevar himself was recounting the events secondhand.

In 1889 Drevar published a booklet on the sea serpent, possibly a reprint of the "pamphlets" he showed the police when arrested in 1881. There is evidence that he still believed he had been treated unfairly in 1879. "I was robbed, wronged and grossly insulted," he wrote. "I made a desperate effort to drag the wrongs to right but failed. I hope someday to say more on the subject," which presumably alludes to the criminal case, which is otherwise not mentioned. This was Drevar's last publication on the sea serpent. Unfortunately, at the beginning of January 1890, a youth capsized in one of his cask-rafts or velocipedes. Drevar dived into save him, but got into difficulties and drowned. The youth survived. There was a collection for Drevar's wife, who ultimately returned to London and died in 1904. Drevar himself received a flattering obituary in the local newspapers for his travels, interest in lifesaving and his heroic death. The obituaries did not mention his criminal conviction of 1881 nor his obsession with sea serpents.

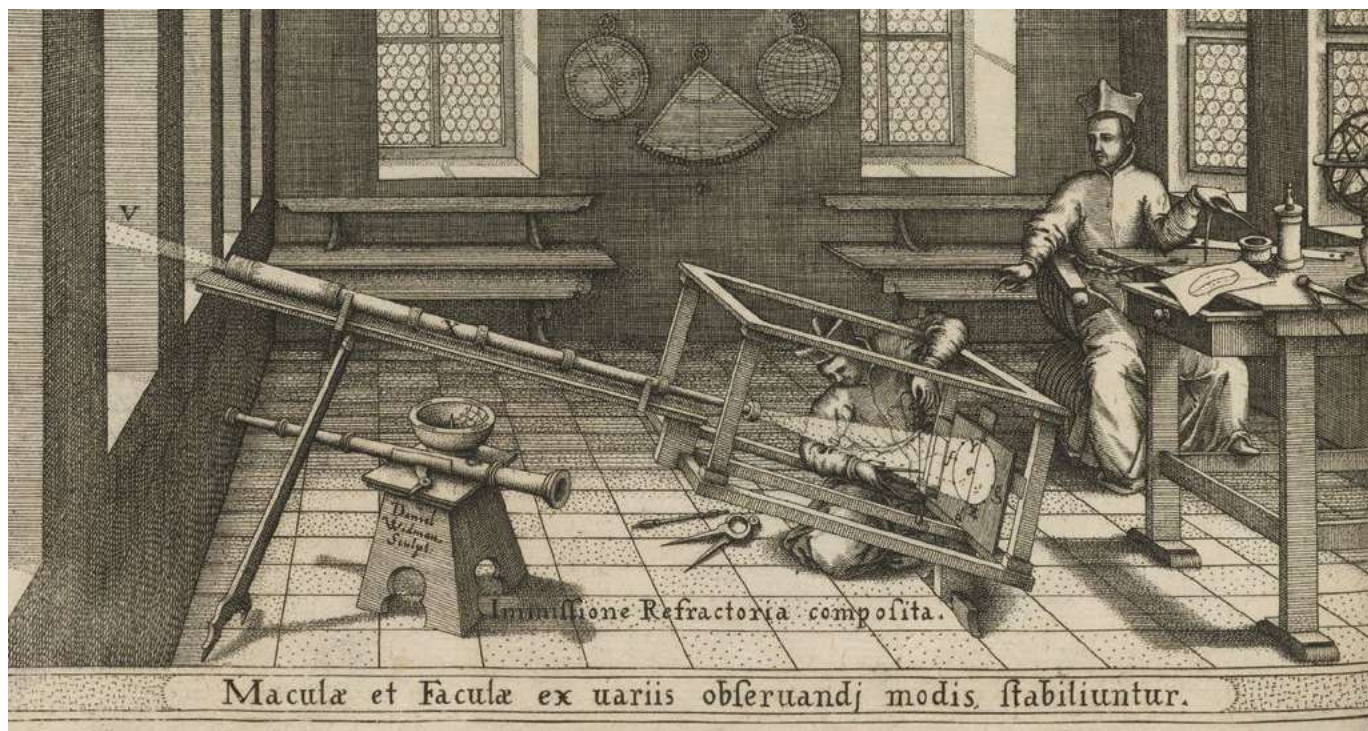
NOTES

For a detailed account of the life of George Drevar with sources, see the academic articles at www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00253359.2021.1940521 and www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00253359.2022.2009248

➡ **CHARLES PAXTON** is a statistical ecologist at the University of St Andrews and has published a number of scientific papers on marine cryptozoological themes; see www.sea-monster.info.

A STORM ON THE SUN

DAVID HAMBLING looks at the surprising history of sunspots and solar storms, examines the heated arguments about their nature and influence, and considers the likelihood that the next Carrington Event will have cataclysmic results here on Earth...

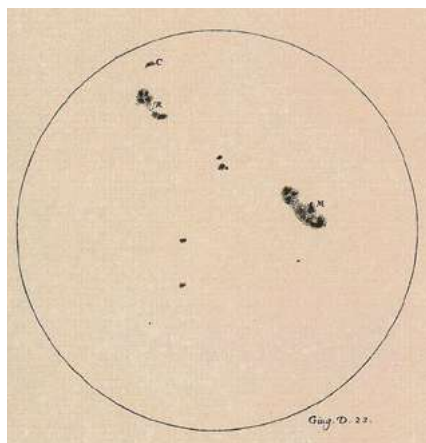


To the naked eye, the Sun is a perfect golden disc, and has inspired awe and reverence for millennia. Look more closely though, and you may see flaws in that heavenly complexion. When sunspots were discovered in the 17th century, astronomers debated what they might be: the tops of solar mountains glimpsed through gaps in the clouds, the eyes of immense hurricanes, or something else entirely?

They also wondered what effect the regular waxing and waning of these curious phenomena might have on life on Earth. The effects of sunspots on the weather, the economy, and much else have been a subject of research and heated argument – and none more heated than when it comes to their impact on climate change.

One thing we do know is that sunspots bring solar storms. In 1859 astronomer Richard Carrington observed an event which was dramatic at the time but which is likely to be devastating the next time it happens. And while giant meteors only strike Earth every few thousand years, another Carrington Event is likely in the next few decades. To understand why, we need to look at a little bit of scientific history.

IT WAS DRAMATIC AT THE TIME, BUT IS LIKELY TO BE DEVASTATING THE NEXT TIME IT HAPPENS



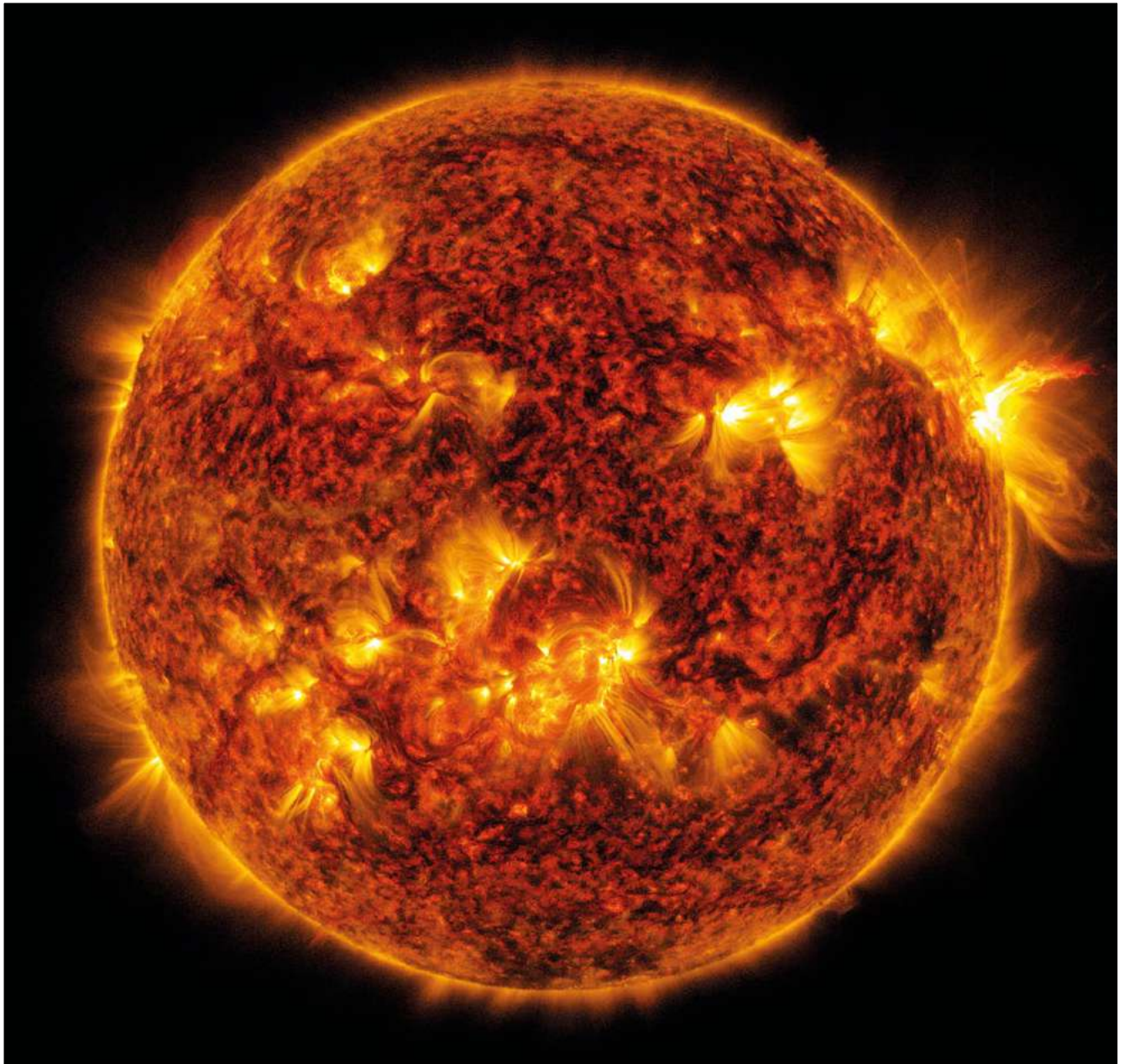
ABOVE: Christian Scheiner viewing sunspots. **BELOW LEFT:** A drawing of the Sun made by Galileo on 23 June 1613 showing the positions and sizes of sunspots. **FACING PAGE:** Solar flares recorded by NASA's Solar Dynamics Observatory on 22 May

A SPOT OF TROUBLE FOR GALILEO

The Pisan astronomer and proto-scientist Galileo Galilei is often credited with discovering sunspots in 1610. His claim of primacy is widely quoted, even though he was certainly not the first to see them.

Astronomers in previous centuries had documented curious markings which appeared on the face of the Sun, changed, moved and disappeared some days later. Nobody in Galileo's Europe was aware of Chinese records of sunspots dating back to 28 BC, and John of Worcester's description of them in an 1128 chronicle had been overlooked.

Several of Galileo's contemporaries equipped with newly invented telescopes were also observing sunspots at very much the same time – notably Thomas Harriott, who saw them in 1609, and Johannes Fabricius, who published a pamphlet about them in 1611. Galileo himself did not write about



NASA / SDO

sunspots until a public debate in 1612.

Christoph Scheiner, a Jesuit mathematician at the German University of Ingolstadt, published *Three Letters on Solar Spots* in 1612, arguing that the apparent spots were in fact inner planets passing across the face of the Sun. This was in line with the Jesuit stance that the heavens were perfect and unchanging. Ironically enough, the Church was straining against the facts to defend a doctrine it had acquired from the pagan philosopher Aristotle.

Galileo joined the debate, and demolished Scheiner's argument with his observations showing that the spots were on or near the surface of the Sun, changed their shapes, and could be seen to form and dissipate on the solar disc: they could only be features on a changing Sun, not planets passing in front of it. (It is a myth, incidentally, that looking at the Sun made Galileo blind. His sight did not start to fade until some 20 years after he made his sunspot observations.)

Galileo won the argument. Scheiner continued to observe sunspots, and later wrote a treatise confirming Galileo's view. However, he was now Galileo's fierce enemy, and Scheiner's influence within the Jesuit order may have been a key factor in driving forward Galileo's infamous trial on a charge of heresy in 1633.

HERSCHEL'S HOT SPOTS

By the 18th century, scientists were making regular observation of sunspots. Their records, collected over the decades, showed that sunspots follow a cycle of roughly 11 years, with the number of visible spots rising steadily until sometimes 100 or more may be visible at a time. The number of spots, the Zurich Number or Wolf Number, then gradually diminishes, leaving the face of the Sun completely unblemished for a brief period of time before the cycle starts again.

Sir William Herschel was the first to suggest that sunspots had significant effects

on Earth. Herschel was the only person alive to have discovered a new planet (Uranus) and was also the discoverer of infrared radiation, which gave his views a certain authority. Herschel suggested that the Sun's atmosphere was composed of two gases – one transparent, the other luminous – and that sunspots were occasional gaps in the luminous clouds giving a view of the solid surface below.

More surprisingly, Herschel thought the Sun was itself a cold body with a solid surface like a planet and might well be inhabited by living beings. He cited the well-known observation that temperature decreases with altitude, which to him indicated that the Sun's rays interacted with Earth's atmosphere to produce warmth, but were not themselves warm.

Herschel speculated that sunspots affected the amount of solar heat reaching the Earth. In the absence of good temperature records, he looked at data on the price of wheat, which Adam Smith had compiled

in his 1776 magnum opus *The Wealth of Nations*. According to Herschel's analysis, good weather, and good harvests, showed exactly the same 11-year cycle as sunspot activity.

Despite Herschel's eminence, the theory was badly received and widely mocked. The *Edinburgh Review* called it a "grand absurdity" and compared it to the work of the mad scientists of Laputa in Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*.

While the sunspot theory of economics was generally ignored, it did attract a small but loyal following. In 1878, the notable Victorian economist William Stanley Jevons carried out his own analysis, and believed that sunspot cycles correlated with the production of rice and cotton, giving them vital importance to the British Empire. Again, his idea was not widely accepted, but interest in sunspots has appeared again and again in economics.

CARRINGTON'S CATAclysm

In 1859, British amateur astronomer Richard Carrington was one of the most dedicated and methodical observers of the Sun, recording the daily changes in sunspots with his own 4.5in telescope.

Carrington wanted to determine the Sun's speed of rotation. This should have been a straightforward matter of seeing how long it takes a sunspot to travel from one side of the Sun to the other, but different observers came up with different answers. Carrington's careful logging of the progress of individual sunspots showed those at higher latitudes moved at a slower rate than those at lower latitudes. This disproved Herschel's theory of a cold, solid Sun, showing that the observed surface could only be gaseous.

On the morning of Thursday, 1 September 1859, Carrington was making his usual observations of a dimmed image of the Sun's disc projected on to a screen. Photography was not yet reliable, so Carrington recorded everything with hand-drawn sketches.

"I had secured diagrams of all the groups and detached spots... when within the area of the great north group (the size of which had previously excited general remark), two patches of intensely white and bright light broke out," he noted.

The patches were so bright Carrington at first thought that a stray ray of sunlight had come into the room, but he soon realised the brightness was a tremendous eruption on the Sun of a type never before seen. He rushed out to get a servant to witness the event, but returning less than a minute later he was "mortified to find that it was already much changed and enfeebled".

Sunspots lasted for days; the solar flare was gone in seconds. Though disappointed he had missed the best of it, Carrington carefully wrote up his observations. His account was backed up by amateur astronomer Richard Hodgson, who had been watching the Sun at the same time. They avoided conferring and submitted separated reports to the Royal Astronomical Society.

Meanwhile, extraordinary things were



ABOVE: "A Typical Sunspot": the surface of the Sun as observed and drawn by SP Langley, 23-24 Dec 1873.

BELOW: William Stanley Jevons linked sunspot activity to food production and economics.



happening on and above Earth. Twelve hours after Carrington's observation, the most vivid display of the aurora borealis in living memory played out across the skies, not just in northerly latitudes, but as far south as Havana, Cuba. Many observers said the aurora was as bright as moonlight, and provided enough illumination to read newspaper headlines, as seas of red and white light shimmered and flowed. "The hands of angels shifted the glorious scenery of the heavens," as the *Cincinnati Daily Commercial* put it. In many places the spectacular auroral display continued until dawn, before it was finally

lost in daylight.

At the same time, chaos struck the long-distance telegraphic system as powerful electrical currents surged through it, with lines throwing out sparks and, in some places, shocking the operators. In Washington, DC, an arc of electricity leapt out from the apparatus to strike operator Frederick Royce in the forehead. Royce was stunned, but later made a full recovery.

While some telegraphs were put out of action by the electrical storm, others worked better than usual, even when the batteries disconnected, powered by some unknown electrical force. The magnetic observatory at Kew had recorded dramatic fluctuations in the Earth's magnetic field during the auroral event, and this was clearly related to the disturbances of the telegraphic system, though the mechanism was mysterious.

While the scientific discussion about what had actually happened continued for decades, we know now that the broad outline was fairly simple: the solar flare observed by Carrington had ejected a mass of charged particles which had impacted the Earth.

SUNSPOT SCIENCE

Modern astronomers have a much clearer idea of what sunspots are than their forebears in Carrington's time, though scientific understanding is still far from complete.

The Sun can be understood as a dynamo,

a mass of hot gases moving around like a pan of boiling water. The high temperature means that the gases are ionised, and the constant motion of charged material produces powerful magnetic fields. The lines of magnetic force can get coiled and twisted and may project beyond the Sun's surface – and this is what produces sunspots.

Sunspots always occur in pairs, with matched spots in the northern and southern hemispheres, as these are the places where magnetic field lines emerge from and re-join the Sun's surface. The magnetism has a cooling effect, so the spots are less hot than the surrounding area – about 4,000°C compared to 5,000°C – and so less luminous, which is why they appear as darker patches on the bright surface.

Sunspots are huge – on average, each is about the size of the Earth, though some are very much bigger. As the magnetic field lines around the edge of the spot constantly shift and twist, they may break, producing a flare and a blast of radiation. Large flares may be accompanied by an eruption of solar gas – a coronal mass ejection or 'CME' – of the sort witnessed by Carrington. When a CME strikes the Earth's magnetic field the result is a solar storm, with the reverberations causing a variety of electrical and magnetic effects.

CMEs are by no means rare, in fact the Sun emits one per day on average. Fortunately, the vast majority do not head our way, as the Sun fires them out in all directions as it spins. A minor event might go largely un-noticed, as might one that is very diffuse rather than a compact mass of particles; but the sort of event Carrington witnessed will have more serious effects next time it happens because of our reliance on electricity and related technology.

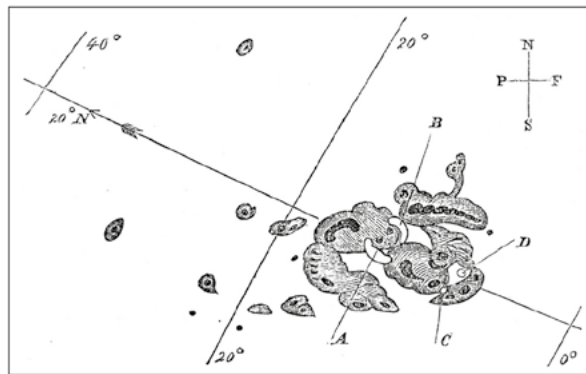
A CARRINGTON CATASTROPHE

The first impact would be in space. The blast of high-energy particles would damage every exposed satellite, causing failures in electronic equipment. Exactly how severely depends very much on the satellites and the CME, but it could potentially knock out much of our communication, navigation and Earth-sensing capability.

More serious effects would occur below. In 1859, the only long conductive cables on the planet were the telegraph lines. These days there are many more conductors that will suffer an induced current in a magnetic storm, of which the most important are power lines. The current from a Carrington Event would overload power lines and blow out the transformers connecting them to the power grid. We know this because it has already happened on a small scale: on 13 March 1989 a solar storm caused a blackout across Quebec, leaving millions of people without power for around 12 hours.

The problems in Quebec were easily solved, but a larger event would be more challenging. In the US in particular, this type of overload tends to cause cascading failures. When one part of the network goes down, the next section is also overloaded and goes down in turn.

DEATH AT THE DEVIL'S JUMP



Richard Carrington might have contributed far more to solar astronomy if his career – and his life – had not been cut short by an infamous scandal.

The heir of a Deptford brewery magnate, Carrington disposed of the business to devote himself to astronomy and had little apparent interest in earthly, let alone family, matters.

But in 1868, when he was 42, Carrington became infatuated with 23-year-old Rosa Rodway, an attractive but illiterate woman who lived with her brother William in London.

Rodway may have been uneducated, but she was calculating; she was only persuaded to marry Carrington after she had seen legal proofs of his wealth. Even then she declined to live at his home in Surrey, claiming she needed to stay in London to gain an education worthy of an astronomer's wife.

After a year of this, Carrington lost patience and ceased paying his wife's rent in London, so she was forced to live with him at his house and observatory at the ominously named Middle Devil's Jump.

Villagers noted a tall, handsome man paying visits when Carrington was absent. This quietly scandalous behaviour continued until one day the visitor stabbed first Rosa Carrington and then himself in what looks like an attempted murder-suicide.

The visitor was the supposed 'William Rodway' – not in fact Rosa's brother, but her lover. Apparently, she had tried to end things between them and he felt betrayed. The man's true identity was never discovered. All that was known was that he was a former dragoon and circus worker, and had been on intimate terms with Rosa for some years before and during her relationship with Carrington.

Neither of them was seriously injured. 'William Rodway' was arrested and sentenced to 20 years hard labour. He died in prison.

While recovering from her injuries, Rosa Carrington became addicted to chloral hydrate, a popular sedative which was only edged out by barbiturates in the 20th century. A year after the assault, she died of an overdose. The coroner criticised Richard Carrington for not taking better care of her; he too was taking chloral hydrate by this time.

Two weeks after the inquest, Carrington himself was found dead in his empty house, the servants having left when his wife died. Supposedly he died of natural causes – stated as a brain haemorrhage – although it was suspected an overdose was involved.

Brilliant as he was as a solar observer, Carrington seems to have been a very poor judge of people, and the world of astronomy was robbed of his talents.

Richard Carrington had requested he be buried in an unmarked grave. However, he was placed alongside his wife in the Carrington family vault in the grand Victorian cemetery at West Norwood, with the epitaph "Sic Itur Ad Astra" – "Thus, we go to the stars." This is a quote from Virgil's *Aeneid*, appropriately spoken by the sun-god Apollo.



TOP: Sunspots of 1 September 1859, as sketched by Richard Carrington. ABOVE: Carrington's house and observatory at Redhill in Surrey.



A WAR OF THE WORLDS

HG Wells was also a Victorian science enthusiast, and would have been aware of his Surrey neighbour Richard Carrington's work. Perhaps it had an influence on one of Wells's greatest hits, the 1898 *War of the Worlds*, the undisputed ancestor of every alien-invasion story.

The book starts with an astronomer viewing something unusual on the face of Mars – “a huge outbreak of incandescent gas upon the planet”. Later observations confirm “a mass of flaming gas, chiefly hydrogen, moving with an enormous velocity towards this Earth.” This is exactly the same as Carrington's coronal mass ejection event, which also consisted mainly of superheated hydrogen, and which travelled at around a million miles an hour. “He compared it to a colossal puff of flame suddenly and violently squirted out of the planet, as flaming gases rushed out of a gun,” Wells adds.

As with the Carrington event, this puff of flame is not the real danger, but the sign that something has been launched towards Earth – something that will have disastrous results. However, rather than magnetic storms, in Wells' story what strikes Earth is a cylinder full of tentacled Martian invaders who start assembling their tripod war machines...

Wells's version may have been less scientifically plausible, but it struck a vein of popular interest and box-office gold that is still being mined to this day.



ABOVE: Artist Frederic Edwin Church witnessed the historic 1859 display of the Northern Lights; some years later he painted his 1865 work *Aurora Borealis*.

WE CAN BE SURE THAT ANOTHER CARRINGTON EVENT WILL HIT SOONER OR LATER

There is also the question of spare parts being available. Power companies have some spares, and if one area is badly hit they can call on their neighbours. This would not be the case in a Carrington Event.

Even larger events are possible. Physicist Fusa Miyake measures isotope abundances in ancient tree rings, which are affected by solar storms. A powerful solar storm will produce more Carbon-14 in the upper atmosphere. Miyake discovered a dramatic spike in Carbon-14 in the year 774 or 775, suggesting a massive event known as the ‘Miyake Event’ or the ‘Charlemagne Event’. The *Anglo Saxon Chronicles* records the appearance of a “red crucifix” in the heavens, which some have interpreted as an auroral display.

The Miyake Event is believed to have been at least 10 times as powerful as the Carrington Event. Similar but lesser events have been detected around 660 BC and AD 993.

When a Coronal Mass Ejection missed Earth by a narrow margin in 2012, a team from Lloyd's of London and the National Atmospheric and Environmental Research Agency in the US estimated that a Carrington-class event would cause between \$0.6 and \$2.6 trillion in damages to the United States alone. It would also cause global disruption, blackouts and damage to electrical grids. That may seem like small

potatoes compared to Covid-19 – the US government has spent over \$4 trillion in pandemic relief – but this would happen instantly rather than over two years.

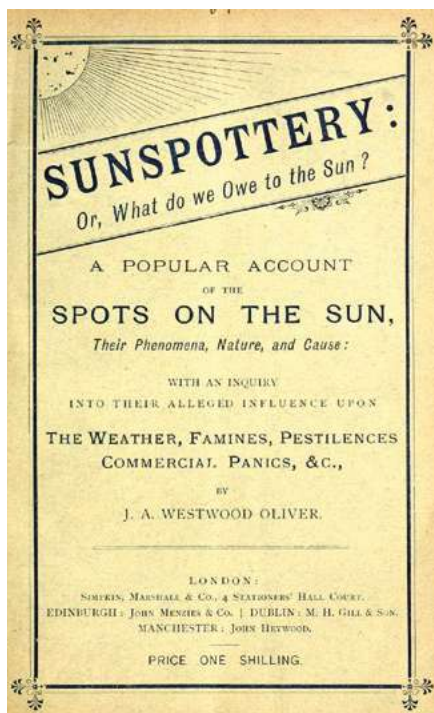
The pandemic has also alerted us to something else. In the event of a catastrophe, governments do not always pull together to help each other as we might expect, and people may be less civic-minded that we would hope.

Large power transformers can be effectively insulated from surges for about \$350,000 per circuit, according to estimates from the Foundation for Resilient Societies. Putting this together, they estimated that the entire US grid could be protected from something between \$10 billion and \$30 billion.

Advance warning would also provide some defence for unprotected circuits. NASA monitors solar activity and can give warnings of possible solar storms striking Earth about 12 hours ahead of time. Close to Earth, the Deep Space Climate Observatory (DSCOVR) satellite measures the solar wind and will provide exact details of what is incoming – but only 15 to 45 minutes before it hits. In theory, this would allow the power grid to be shut down before overloads occurred. Again, though, the pandemic has alerted us that it might not be so easy: power companies and politicians may not be happy turning out the lights just because the scientists say there is a giant storm on the way.

SOLAR CYCLES: ECONOMICS AND CLIMATE

Herschel believed he could show a correlation between the sunspot number and wheat prices for any given year. Jevons believed that the effects were much wider and could be seen across a whole range of commodity prices and affected the economy as a whole. Over the years many economists and sci-



NAGOYA UNIVERSITY

LEFT: The cover of the 1883 book *Sunspottery*, by JA Westwood Oliver, examining the alleged influence of sunspots on various aspects of life on Earth. ABOVE: Physicist Fusa Miyake, whose study of isotopes in ancient tree rings revealed a massive event in 774 or 775, 10 times more powerful than the Carrington Event.

entists of varying degrees of respectability have championed versions of sunspot theory.

There has always been a certain amount of pushback on these claims. In response to Jevons, the Royal Statistical Society printed a parody entitled “University Boat-Races and Sunspot Cycles”, which showed the mathematical correlation between the annual rowing competitions between Oxford and Cambridge and solar activity. Careful selection of data can make this type of ‘correlation’ look plausible.

The term ‘sunspottery’ was coined for beliefs that irrelevant external factors might influence the economy, and ‘sunspot’ is now used as a technical term in economic theory for any arbitrary change in expectations. These expectations can themselves affect the economy, even though there is nothing behind them. Scientific papers are still published showing how sunspot cycles appear to coincide with crop harvests, and there are numerous popular books on how sunspots are linked to everything from wine vintages to stock market crashes.

However, statistical analysis is a tricky business and can easily trip up the unwary or over-enthusiastic. In 2013, Jeffery Love of the US Geological Survey carried out the most detailed analysis up to that date and concluded that there was no statistically significant correlation. Love looked into the difference between his conclusions and some previous research, which found 11-year cycles corresponding to the solar cycles in wheat and oat prices, fish stocks, soybeans, grape harvests and other variables. Love’s view is that ‘heavy filtering’ was a factor: authors were selective about which data they explored, cherry-picking (or only reporting on) the sets of data that worked with their theory.

This led to peculiar and sometimes contradictory results. A team of Israeli researchers

claimed a strong correlation of wheat prices with sunspot number; but, in their version, prices fell as sunspots decreased, which was the exact opposite of what Herschel had believed.

Economics is not a precise science. As has been observed, less than five per cent of economists predict a crash before it happens. In this context, sunspots may be as good a tool for prediction as any. On the other hand, weather science is far more exact, and the connection between sunspots and weather has been far more than a fringe interest.

One difference is that scientists have a definite mechanism to explain how sunspots could exert an effect. In the 1990s, physicist Brian Tinsley showed that cosmic rays could ionise ice particles in the atmosphere, causing them to become charged. These charged particles were more effective at acting as nuclei for the formation of clouds than un-charged particles. As sunspots and solar magnetic activity influence the amount of cosmic radiation reaching Earth, it seemed possible that solar cycles could have an influence on climate. Decades of serious research, both laboratory and theoretical, followed, including a set of experiments called CLOUD at CERN in Switzerland simulating cloud formation effects. Sunspots were cited by sceptics as an indication that climate change was not, after all, man-made.

It was not until 2013 that Terry Sloan at the University of Lancaster and Arnold Wolfendale at the University of Durham demonstrated that neither changes in solar activity, nor its effect on cosmic rays, were significant factors in climate change.

For the time being, the accepted wisdom is that sunspots do not appear to influence the weather or the economy. We do not fully understand the dynamics of sunspots, and nobody can yet predict the fluctuations of

the solar cycles or the patterns of solar flares and coronal mass ejections.

The one thing we can say for sure is that another Carrington Event will hit sooner or later, and that it will be possible to mitigate its effects if we act in time. What is less clear is whether we can raise our heads above our present concerns and take the necessary measures before disaster strikes.

FURTHER READING

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Space Weather Prediction Centre: Coronal Mass Ejections: www.swpc.noaa.gov/phenomena/coronal-mass-ejections

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Chris Genharbt, “Carrington Event still provides warning of Sun’s potential 161 years later”: www.nasaspaceflight.com/2020/08/carrington-event-warning/

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Thomas Sumner, “Why sunspots won’t help you make a fortune on wheat futures” <https://blogs.agu.org/geospace/2013/08/26/why-sunspots-wont-help-you-make-a-fortune-on-wheat-futures/>

❖ **DAVID HAMBLING** is FT’s regular science columnist. His books include *Weapons Grade* and *Swarm Troopers*. He also writes Lovecraftian science fiction, and his time-travel adventure *City of Sorcerers* is out now.



A WARNING TO THE FORTEAN

ROB GANDY is back on the weirdness beat in Lincolnshire, where he finds that sometimes real-life events can morph into local supernatural folklore...



LEE BEEL / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

ABOVE: The Ancholme Valley in rural north Lincolnshire.

Folklore is rich with stories of ghosts, goblins and guff, and researchers should always search for their origins, as far as possible. It was during my investigations into 'The Ruskington Horror'¹ (see **FT401:32-38, 402:38-43**) and other road ghosts from around old Lincolnshire that I came across a couple of longstanding stories that appear to show how actual events – albeit unusual ones – might, over time, become part of local supernatural folklore.

HE SAID HE WOULD
CROSS THE CARRS
ON THE DARKEST
NIGHT OF THE YEAR

TWO GHOSTLY CHILDREN

The first followed my 'call' for witnesses of the Scotter Road Spectre (**FT411:48-50**) in the *Scunthorpe Telegraph*.² Among the responses was a particularly intriguing one about the ghosts of two children. Fifty-four-year-old Mrs R stated that she had lived all her life on Lodge Road, Scunthorpe, which is in the area immediately north-west of the Frodingham Viaduct on Scotter Road. As a child she used to play on and near the viaduct, and in the adjoining fields and woods. She was always

told of sightings of not one but two children who had died after being poisoned by their father. She understood that they had lived in an old house that used to be beside the viaduct opposite the Brumby Wood Lane junction. She didn't know how true this was and suspected that the story might have been a scare tactic employed by parents to stop kids going near the ruins of the house. She still walks her dogs through the area and finds that at dusk it can be quite eerie.

My enquiries led me to the incredibly helpful Tim Davies, Librarian at Scunthorpe Central Library, and what follows is down to his research and advice. My first objective was to establish whether a father had poisoned his two children, suspecting that this would have taken place either side of WWI, which would have been when Mrs R's own parents and grandparents were alive. Tim thought that he recalled a double-murder of children from some of his earlier work and agreed to look up the details.

He found an article in the *Lincolnshire Star* on Saturday 19 November 1921 that described how the skeletons of two children were uncovered by workmen in the delphs between the station and the viaduct.³ The bodies were lying among 6ft-tall reeds; it was thought singular that they were not discovered earlier, given that they were lying close to a path to the west of the viaduct, which was used as a short cut to Scunthorpe by local inhabitants. The bodies were too badly decomposed for a visual identification, and so the police went to great lengths to identify the children from their clothing.

Their attention settled on a house in Fenton Street, Scunthorpe, where the father of two little children was known to have lodged prior to August. The man concerned – Charles Herbert Wolfe Senior – had a domineering nature and was determined to keep the children from his estranged wife and father-in-law in Burnley, while apparently enjoying an 'unconventional relationship' with his landlady. Wolfe had obtained work in Manchester and returned to Scunthorpe at the end of August for the children: Grace May (six) and Charles Herbert Junior (three). He told the landlady that a nurse would meet them at Doncaster; the girl was to go to a nunnery while he intended to make a sailor of the boy. The landlady never saw the children alive again, but her description of the clothing they were wearing corresponded with that found on the two skeletons. Wolfe was traced to Kendal where he was arrested. The trial was the subject of lurid headlines in the *Lincolnshire Star* and undoubtedly caused much talk and conjecture among the local population. Eventually, Wolfe was found guilty of manslaughter and sentenced to seven years in prison.⁴

It's easy to see how such a notorious event would have given rise to stories about ghostly children, with the details evolving with each telling, and parents using them as a means of getting their kids to return home on time (as Mrs R suspects). Such parental concern will



TOP: The Frodingham Viaduct on Scotter Road, Scunthorpe. In this old photo the house by the viaduct is visible. ABOVE: The viaduct as it appears today.

only have been accentuated by the knowledge that the viaduct area had been the location for child abuse in the 1930s, thereby further justifying warnings of this type.⁵

THE DEAD HAND

During our correspondence Tim pointed me to potential links between an old local folk tale and an earlier historical event, kindly providing references. The story of 'The Dead Hand' was one of several collected by Mrs MC Balfour (a cousin of Robert Louis Stevenson) from locals when she lived in Redbourne, north Lincolnshire, and was published in 1891.⁶ It is set in the Lincolnshire Carrs, the wetlands of north Lincolnshire that lie between Lincoln Edge and the Wolds and are made up of wide swamps bordering the course of small streams or rivers. Balfour wrote her tales in the local spoken dialect, which makes for a challenging read today. I present below a summary by Maureen James

from her PhD thesis,⁷ who placed the tale firmly in the Ancholme Valley (presumably close to Redbourne), the River Ancholme running through Brigg to join the River Humber in the north, with its source just north of the village of Ingham:

A long time ago the Carrs were a fearsome place. Long Tom Pattison was a wild slip of a lad, always up to mischief, but no one had an evil word against him, as he was full of fun. There were lots of tales of boggarts and horrors and such, and people would not be out at night alone. They would also carry something to keep the evil ones off. Tom wouldn't have a safe-keep though his mother had got one from the wise-woman for him. He said he would cross the Carrs on the darkest night of the year, with just a lantern, even round by the willow snag. Despite everyone trying to stop him, Tom went out onto the Carrs with his lantern, singing and whistling. The other lads followed him. As Tom came near



the willow snag, the wind came up the valley with a moan, and chill and damp came from the sea – wailing as if it carried with it all the evil things that dwell in the darkness. Out went Tom's lantern and he stopped singing and stood still by the snag. The horrors came and the other lads dropped onto their knees, watching and praying to the saints, the Virgin and wise-women. They heard Tom shouting and swearing and could see him fighting with the Things. They saw a disembodied hand pull him towards the black bog. The horrors came round the lads, but their prayers and safe-keeps protected them. Tom disappeared. His mother searched for him to no avail. Seven nights later he was seen sitting with his back to the snag and his feet in the water. He was shaking, his hair had turned white and his hand had been pulled clean off. He never spoke again. He and his mother died a year later, and until the Carrs were drained, they haunted the area.

I should add that in the full text, when Tom was found "his back was bent, his limbs were shaking like an old man, his blazing eyes glared from a white wrinkled face, and his hair was long wisps of white and grey",⁸ perhaps suggesting that wherever he had gone for those seven nights, he might actually have lived for many, many years – a possibility that has a touch of fairy lore about it.

Locals from the Carrs would know that people had disappeared in the bogs and that it was probable that their bodies would lie under the surface wherever they fell. Since before 1700 "human bodies entire and uncorrupted" had been found in peat



'TIDDY MUN' WAS BELIEVED TO CONTROL THE WATERS AND MISTS

and bogs in different parts of England, sometimes with their hands holding sticks or tufts of heather, as if they had been trying to pull themselves out.⁹ Some bearing signs of ritual sacrifice had been found in the nearby Isle of Axholme,¹⁰ and locals would undoubtedly have interpreted them in a magical and superstitious context. In 1747 the body of a woman, who appeared to have accidentally sunk to her death, was found by a man digging for fuel on Axholme. Her skeleton was complete and standing in an upright position, and the style of sandals on her feet pointed to her dying around the 11th century. The hand was shown to the Society of Antiquities and so must have been separated from the rest of the skeleton. The nails on her hand were described as being as fresh as when alive, though shrunken on being exposed to the air.¹¹ There can be little doubt that this discovery would have become widely known, and it is not too difficult to envision its 'Chinese whispers'/urban legend evolution into a story where the revenant of someone who was swallowed by the bog clutches at passers-by with a disembodied hand and drags them under. What better way for parents to dissuade their children from venturing out into the dangerous Carrs, particularly at night?

The story of 'The Dead Hand' must have its origins more than a century before it was told to Balfour, because in the late 18th century the notoriously unhealthy Lincolnshire fen country was systematically drained with the aid of Dutch engineers. The impact of this radical environmental change was con-



ABOVE: The transformation of Lincolnshire's fen country in a painting by John Sell Cotman: "Drainage Mills in the Fens, Croyland, Lincolnshire", c.1835. TOP: An illustration of a spectre in a marsh by Irving Montagu, 1893: Lincolnshire's 'Tiddy Mun' was such a spirit, thought to haunt the region's carrs and bogs.



SVEN ROSBORN / CREATIVE COMMONS

LEFT: The Dead Hand: Right hand of the Danish bog body known as Grauballe Man, discovered in 1952.

siderable, as livestock and infants sickened, ponies were lamed, and cottage roofs slipped and crumbled. Arguably, this was caused by the hydro-engineering, which affected the acid balance of soil and pasture, thereby leading to disease in cattle. The ground hardened for wandering ponies, and land levels fell by up to five feet (1.5m) in places, leading to subsidence. Many local people blamed these on 'Tiddy Mun', the fairy-like spirit believed to control the waters and mists over the bog land.¹² That the story survived for so long and was believed to be true by its teller serves to demonstrate its power and to highlight how such tales captured people's imagination and were handed down through the generations.

CONCLUSIONS

Of course, I cannot state with 100 per cent certainty that the events I refer to are where the ghost stories actually originated. I have confidence that they are; but even if they aren't, then what I believe to be important is the process of largely oral tradition that will have been in play, and which might have conflated a number of different historical events. Even though one event is old and one is comparatively modern, it can be seen how they might have developed into something more mysterious and fantastic when discussed by ordinary people, as would most certainly have happened.

In part, this happens because people do not necessarily know all of the details: key points will likely become exaggerated and gaps in the narrative filled in with suppositions with each retelling – why let facts get in the way of a good yarn intended to entertain friends over a drink? Critically, it will be readily understood how parents might use such ghost stories to control their children in order to keep them safe – not an unreasonable practice. Some parents would have believed the ghost stories to be true, while

others may have doubted their provenance; but the latter would be unlikely to contradict the former because the safety of the children is paramount, and so the stories serve a purpose. Children (who enjoy scary stories) will believe them because their parents and grandparents told them they were true, and consequently they will tell their own children in time.

How many allegedly fortaean phenomena may likewise be similar interpretations of memorable or shocking events that have become weirder and more astonishing with each retelling? We will probably never know, but it underlines the importance of trying to trace such stories back to their source.

My sincere thanks to Tim Davies for all his help and advice during my research, which I greatly appreciated.

NOTES

1 www.lincolnshirelive.co.uk/news/local-news/haunted-stretch-lincolnshire-road-left-345538

2 www.grimsbytelegraph.co.uk/news/local-news/tall-ghost-fancy-dress-who-3617213

3 The death notices for the children state they were found "in a delph or creek between the Great Central Railway Embankment and Marsdens footpath in the parish of Brumby". There was a footpath between Burringham and Scotter Road (suggesting that the station was Althorpe). It followed the north side of the railway embankment before passing under the railway at the eastern end just before the Frodingham Viaduct; it then led on to Scotter Road. On a 1907 map there were marsh beds north of the railway, near where the footpath crosses under the railway. Tim Davies suspects that this is probably the spot where the bodies were found, given that they were discovered by men working for the farmer of nearby Frodingham Grange. One of the reports of the trial mentions a witness seeing Wolfe and two children walking the footpath.

4 That Wolfe was found guilty of manslaughter rather than murder is surprising, particularly as the death notices state that the children were "killed and murdered by [their] father, the said Charles Herbert Wolfe Senior on the 29th August 1921". It is inferred that there was no clear sign of violence on the bodies, leading to the assumption that

they had been poisoned; but given the state of decomposition it was unlikely that forensic tests of that time could determine the cause of death beyond doubt.

5 "Grave Charges Against Scunthorpe Men", *Scunthorpe & Frodingham Star*, 10 Feb 1934; "Scunthorpe Men On Trial At The Assizes", *Scunthorpe & Frodingham Star*, 24 Feb 1934; "Grave Accusations Against Four Men", *Illustrated Police News*, 15 Feb 1934; "Sentences On Six men", *Hull Daily Mail*, 27 Feb 1934.

6 MC Balfour, "Legends of the Lincolnshire Cars", Part II, (1891) *Folk-Lore*, 2:3, 257-283, DOI: 10.1080/0015587X.1891.9720066/

7 Maureen James, "Investigating the Legends of the Carrs: A Study of the Tales as Printed in Folk-Lore in 1891, 2013. https://pure.southwales.ac.uk/files/2641345/M_James_2013_2060302.pdf. Tim Davies observed that Redbourne, in the valley of the River Ancholme, isn't far away from the Isle of Axholme, and was also marshy country; but some in the Isle have always claimed the tale for themselves. There was indisputably commerce between the Isle and the area near Redbourne, as there were several ferries across the Trent. He has seen evidence of people from the main North Lincolnshire district (which covers Redbourne) moving, marrying and/or being apprenticed across the Trent.

8 Balfour, 1891.

9 B Coles and J Coles, *Peoples of the Wetlands: Bogs, Bodies and Lake Dwellers*, New York: Thames & Hudson, 1989, p.11, p.178.

10 RC Turner and CS Briggs (1986) "The Bog Burials of Britain and Ireland", in IM Stead, JB Bourke & D Brothwell (eds.), *Lindow Man: The Body in the Bog*, New York: Cornell University Press, 1986, pp.144-161.

11 WB Stonehouse, *The History and Topography of the Isle of Axholme: Being that Part of Lincolnshire which is West of Trent*, Longman, Rees, Orme, & Company, 1839, pp.380-382.

12 R Sugg, *Fairies: A Dangerous History*, London: Reaktion Books, 2019, pp.254-255.

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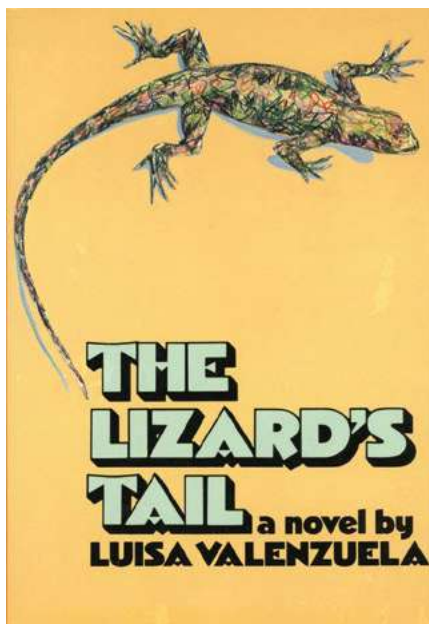
TRIANGLES OF TERROR TRILOGY, SIDE ONE: THE RULE OF THREE

Forty years since the Falklands War, **SD TUCKER** calculates the hidden occult angles behind the conflict, finding that, in Argentina's politics, there are three sides to every story – and every triangle

On 2 April 1982 the ruling Argentinian military junta of General Leopoldo Galtieri decided to distract attention from their violent repression and economic misconduct at home by invading the nearby Falkland Islands, one of the few remaining micro-crumbs of the once-mighty British Empire, something the aggressor nation's feted star of absurdist fiction Jorge Luis Borges memorably compared to “a fight between two bald men over a comb”. For similar failures of tact, Borges had already once been ‘promoted’ from his privileged role as a librarian into the deliberately unsuitable position of Official Inspector of Rabbits at a Buenos Aires marketplace, a fate fit for one of his own characters.

Perhaps not wanting to one day end up in an even weirder job, Borges never penned any direct satires of his country's many post-war dictators, but one of his literary progeny, Luisa Valenzuela, dared do so in her 1983 magic realist allegory *The Lizard's Tail*, a fable so fantastic that non-natives would struggle to perceive it is based on actual domestic political reality. Telling the story of a sinister, baby-eating figure named The Sorcerer and his quest to usurp all political rivals, the book features many unlikely events, from a national ban on mirrors to a magic fart so powerful it sets a whole swamp afire. Unlikeliest of all, this “necromant of confused gonads” is a hermaphroditic “magician of mere hormonal transformations” who self-identifies using the “mutant pronoun” s/ he (how prophetic ...), and possesses a holy “testicular trinity” of no fewer than three balls, one of which is his own sister, Estrella, in embryonic sperm-sack form. Via a process of “Theocopulation”, the triscrotal Sorcerer aims to self-impregnate him/herself to regenerate, Phoenix-style – an abortive procedure which ultimately only unleashes a massive river of blood upon the land.

To us, all of this may seem as random as transmogrifying a literary genius like Borges into a rabbit inspector, but to an Argentine reader, the novel's strange testicular trinity is clearly an obscene and mocking metaphor for recently pressing home affairs. The plot centres upon not only a triad of testes, but



A MAGIC FART SO POWERFUL IT SETS A WHOLE SWAMP ON FIRE

also a triad of three other main characters corresponding to them: a human pyramid.¹ A kind of political love-triangle prevails, involving figures named The Generalissimo and (two sides of the same ball) his deceased wife, The Dead Woman, and her younger living replacement, The Intruder. These would have been immediately recognisable to Valenzuela's compatriots as being Argentina's former military dictator General Juan Domingo Perón, his late wife Eva/Evita Perón, and his next spouse, Isabel Perón, who replaced Juan as President following his death in 1974 (thus magically morphing into his feminine side). As for The Sorcerer himself... we shall not unmask him just yet, but when Isabel rose to power, this dark mage was the true authority behind

The Intruder's throne: a mass-murdering astrologer obsessed with pyramids, triangles and other such occult manifestations of the magic number three.²

THE LOST VIKINGS

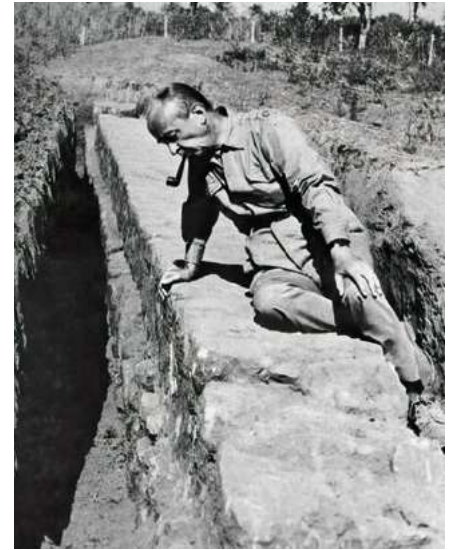
Juan Perón was no occultist himself, but gladly allowed people to think otherwise if it was to his own personal benefit. A consummate opportunist, he sired the paradoxical doctrine of ‘Perónism’, or ‘The Third Position’, which was neither truly left-nor right-wing, but held both potentialities equally latent within itself, like the male and female aspects within The Sorcerer's gonads. Perón cynically, or foolishly, allowed rival leftist and rightist camps to develop amongst his followers and then violently split to the extent that, eventually, they shot one another dead in the streets – thus, the third, centrist testicle that was Perón was torn asunder once his right and left legs finally did the full splits, unleashing rivers of blood nationwide.

An army officer, Perón had gone to Europe in a diplomatic role in 1938, where he grew to admire the similar ‘Third Position’ of Benito Mussolini's fascist Italy, whose doctrines seemed partway between socialism and capitalism, championing trade unionism and the welfare state from the left, and belligerent nationalism, enforced social order and military aggression from the right – a form of ‘National Socialism’, if you will. In 1941, Perón returned home, was promoted to Colonel, and joined GOU, a secret military cabal which launched a successful coup in 1943. All Perón asked was the middling role of Labour and Welfare Minister, knowing full well this would allow him to accumulate a handy power-base amongst the workers and hordes of poor *descamisados*, or ‘shirtless ones’, to aid his further rise later on.

Perón was not literally a Nazi, but during his first spell as President from 1946-55, you could be forgiven for thinking otherwise; he called the Nuremberg Trials “a disgrace” and “an unfortunate lesson for the future of humanity”, which made him wish the Allies had lost. There was already a large, pro-Hitler body of German immigrants in Argentina, and following Nazi defeat, aided

TRIANGLES OF TERROR TRILOGY, SIDE ONE

POPPERFOTO VIA GETTY IMAGES



ABOVE LEFT: Juan and Eva (Evita) Perón celebrating 'Loyalty Day' on 17 October 1951. ABOVE RIGHT: Jacques de Mahieu, searching for pure-blooded Vikings in Paraguay.

by anti-Communist elements in the Vatican, Perón set up 'ratlines' to smuggle war-criminals into the country to exploit their technical and administrative knowledge, including such notorious genocidal nuts as Josef Mengele, Adolf Eichmann and Klaus Barbie. Some more obscure imports held weird, esoteric ideas; notably, there was Ronald Richter, a quack who wasted millions trying to build Perón a special new kind of reactor that would allow pure, concentrated nuclear power to be delivered free to voters' doorsteps inside milk-bottles, and Jacques de Mahieu, a French Waffen-SS man who really should have joined Himmler's *Ahnenerbe* pseudo-archaeology unit (see FT175:30-39, 196:32-39) instead. Taken under Perón's wing, Mahieu wrote speeches for his new Führer, helping formulate Perónist economic policy and lecturing to the Armed Forces. In return, he was granted top academic roles, becoming Deputy Rector at the Buenos Aires Institute of Human Studies.

Yet Mahieu's scholarship, like Perón's politics, had two sides. Alongside texts like *The Communal Economy*, he also produced such screeds as *The Imposture of Christopher Columbus* and *The Secret Geography of America*. A proud "scientific racist", he used his pulpit as Professor of Anthropology to push works like *The Viking King of Paraguay*, arguing that Aryan Vikings had really found the Americas, not Columbus, and that these white warriors had formed the true elite of the Inca Empire. Mahieu felt pure white Nordic Europeans were a special "solar race" whose destiny was to rule the world, hence the frequent Latin American worship of sun-gods – i.e. ancient euhemerised white folk. Following the Vikings into the New World were Knights Templar from Mahieu's own French *Heimat*, bringing the primitive

Indians the basics of civilisation. Argentina had been especially favoured by these early settlers, bolstering its ruling class's self-image as the whitest, most European and refined of all South American nations; the Nazis who sailed there post-1945 were thus recast as heroic latter-day Vikings, not genocidal cowards fleeing justice. "The masses are easier to move with myth than with culture," Mahieu once said, a lesson he had clearly learned from Hitler, and one that President Perón himself soon began applying to his own rule.³

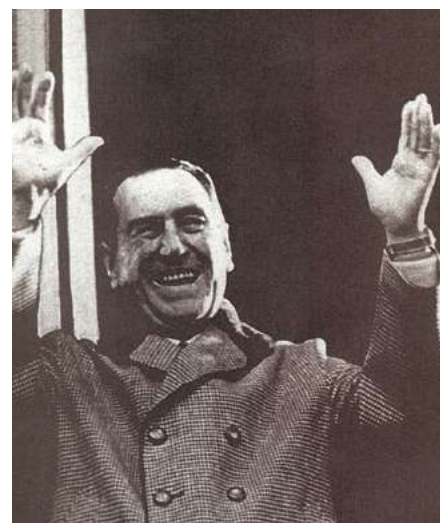
BASHING THE BISHOPS

Perón's political platform was called the Justicialist Party, which preached a doctrine of *justicialismo*, or 'social justice' – but the word 'justice' means different things to different people. At first, Argentina's powerful Catholic Church, impressed by the way Perón pandered to the poor by nationalising industries, mandating wage increases and implementing huge programmes of public works, thought this plan of social justice – resembling as it did the old corporatist 'Christian Economics' of Popes Leo XIII and Pius XI, who had also preached a 'Third Way' between capitalism and Communism – meant Perón was one of them. Pope Pius had looked favourably upon Mussolini's economic reforms, viewing the natural unity between individual worker, trade union and State in Italy's fascist model as imitating the natural unity of the (non-testicular) Holy Trinity. Would Perónist Argentina now become a sort of Catholic dictatorship? Only in the sense that Perón began acting as if he were Christ.

Initially anti-Marxist allies, the Church soon became estranged as Perón's welfare state assumed many of its old poverty-relieving duties, robbing priests of influence

over their flocks, and introduced educational reforms into the once heavily Catholic-controlled school system. Disliking Perón's secularising changes, Catholics even decried the introduction of compulsory PE and Personal Hygiene lessons as promoting a sinful focus on the human body. The year 1948 saw elements of parapsychology placed on the official school curriculum, and when blasphemous classroom propaganda portraying the President and his wife Evita as living saints to rival the Church's traditional dead ones was further used to indoctrinate children, the Church accused Perón's Education Minister of being a covert Freemason out to kill Christianity. In 1954 the Justicialists sought to suppress religious education in schools further, besides legalising brothels and divorce and formally separating Church and State. Bishops condemned Perón during a Corpus Christi parade; Perónist mobs burned down churches in return. In 1955, naval aircraft painted with the message "CHRIST WINS!" dropped bombs on crowds, much as Jesus would have wanted, the first stage in a new rebel military coup which removed Perón from power that September.

Earlier, Perón had sought to discredit the bishops by promoting freedom of worship for any and all other spiritual creeds, whether Christian or openly occult in nature, as one of his modernising reforms; one example was lending official legal status to Rosicrucianism. Billed purely as enabling freedom of personal conscience, this was actually intended to signal the only true approved creed in town was now that of *justicialismo*. A person who simply attends Mass every Sunday, Perón said in 1950, "is not a good Christian". So who was a good Christian, then? Perónist politicians, of course, who did not merely light candles



ABOVE LEFT: 19th century Spiritualist Allan Kardec whose teachings had many acolytes in Argentina. ABOVE CENTRE: The American Pentecostal preacher Tommy Hicks brandishes crutches and sticks cast aside by the newly healed. ABOVE RIGHT: "The Cosmic Conductor of Argentina" – Juan Perón emitting invisible rays through his radar hands.

and say 'Amen', but actually attempted to put Christ's message into action. Perónism, he said, "is an effective, real and honest way of doing Christianity" – unlike, say, actual Christianity.

One group that benefited from this new policy line was the Basilio Scientific School, a reincarnation cult adhering to the teachings of the Victorian-era French Spiritualist Allan Kardec, with thousands of acolytes nationwide. In 1948 the School had been banned, but in 1950 Perón legalised it again, allowing them to hold a mass rally in a public stadium advertised by the provocative slogan "JESUS IS NOT GOD!". Here, a personal letter from Juan and Evita was read out to the crowd, admiring the group's message which, oddly enough, partly chimed with their own. The 'Basilio' in the cult's title refers to a ghost of that name who, together with Jesus and the Virgin Mary, provided spirit messages to the sect's founders, revealing the modern-day Catholic Church was a sham that had split from the true, original form of Christianity – which had never claimed Jesus was God at all, so the spooks said – as far back as the fourth century. Perón, then, was clearly correct when he suggested the current Church were not true Christians: Jesus Himself said so, and any Catholics in the crowd who disagreed were arrested. Later, the School, now a hotbed of Perónism, began channelling the spirit of Evita at their mass gatherings, following her death from cancer in 1952, so she really must have been a secular saint, just as the Perónist classroom textbooks said.⁴

Even better, in 1954 a Pentecostal preacher from the United States named Theodore 'Tommy' Hicks turned up at the offices of the Casa Rosada (the 'Pink House' – Argentina's baby-pink White House equivalent) seeking an audience

THE PENNILESS HICKS KNEW NOTHING OF SOUTH AMERICA

with Perón, proclaiming the President had been chosen to fulfil an important mission from God. While praying in Florida one day, Hicks had suddenly enjoyed a vision of a map of South America, filled with a giant, pampas-sized field of golden wheat just ready to be harvested. Suddenly, the stalks became human bodies with hands stretched aloft crying for "Brother Hicks" to deliver them into salvation. The penniless Hicks knew nothing of South America, and spoke not a word of Spanish, but by some miracle scrambled together enough cash for a one-way flight to Argentina, upon which, for no apparent reason, the magic word "Perón ... Perón ..." kept echoing through his mind. Hicks had never heard of such a fellow, so asked the stewardess if she knew who it might be. Upon being told Perón was the President, Hicks wasted little time in invading the Casa Rosada and demanding an audience via an interpreter. The Minister of Worship said it was impossible to allow random strangers to see his boss, until an underling limped into the office with a swollen knee. Hicks got down on his own knees, fondled the injured joint and prayed to God – whereupon, Hallelujah, the leg was healed! "Can I see the President now?" Tommy asked. The awed Minister said yes.

Inside Perón's office, Hicks quickly cured the President's psoriasis via the Power of the Lord, and the grateful leader asked what he could do in return. Hicks requested a large

football stadium and free advertising in national media so he could hold mass revival meetings to heal the sick through prayer, so converting the nation to more Evangelical ways. Not only did Hicks make Perón's skin as pink and smooth as the stones of the Casa Rosada, he now also presented him with an excellent new way to undermine the Catholic Church, so permission was instantly granted, with free police crowd-control thrown in for good measure. Hicks's Billy Graham-like crusade was a great success, with millions attending his rallies, and innumerable crutches – but sadly, to recall Anatole France's classic barb about Lourdes, no wooden legs – being hurled away by happy converts. When Catholic doctors objected to Perón allowing Hicks to 'cure' people in public like this, he coolly replied: "I must conclude he has the backing of Almighty God, and I can do nothing about that." That's what Perónist media said happened anyway, and their Word was surely Gospel.⁵

THE CHOSEN JUAN

Meanwhile, in neighbouring Brazil, another sect was seeking to seduce a quasi-dictatorial national leader in the shape of Getúlio Vargas, "The Father of the Poor", a populist strongman who twice served as his nation's president, between 1930-45 and 1951-54. An equally half-left, half-right demagogue in the same mould as Perón, Vargas had faded from public life following his ousting by opponents in 1945. Would he ever return? Vargas had no time for the occult, but his daughter Alzira did, learning in 1946 that a part-Italian cult-leader living in Rio de Janeiro named Menotti Carnicelli had made contact with the Archangel Anael,⁶ who was providing celestial prophecies about her father.

Carnicelli was the current meat-vehicle for a truly great soul who in previous lives had solidified into the shape of such notables as

Confucius, Demosthenes and Archimedes, so seemed worth listening to. Joining his 'Occult University', Alzira was told daddy's fall from grace, like that of Lucifer, had a "cosmic significance", being intended only to let his people know what they were missing without him, thus facilitating his imminent re-arrival as dictator by popular demand in a "national consecration" of his rule. Once back on top, Vargas could then be advised by Carnicelli/Anael about what precise policy avenues to pursue. Number one on the list was to create the new nation of 'ABC', a triple union of Argentina, Brazil and Chile, a triangular world superpower able to combat the evil, world-dominating triad of capitalist America, Imperialist Britain and Communist Russia. Vargas's ideological "cousin", Perón, would surely be willing to help this project for Third World freedom – which he actually was.

Although they never met, Perón, recognising an ally, did indeed flirt with ideas of an ABC super-state, providing aid to Vargas during his 1950 re-election campaign. But Carnicelli's initial prophecies of Alzira's father's imminent revival kept on being postponed, and when he terrifyingly broke into her mother's house to sit there babbling endless disturbing facts about triangles to her, Alzira finally broke with him. Getúlio had never cared about the holy man anyway, and when he did return to power in 1951 it had little to do with angelic intervention. In 1954, the President shot himself when about to be toppled once more by rival factions in the military, all of which had gone unforeseen by Anael. "Sincerely, I take my first step on the road to Eternity. I leave Life to enter History," read Vargas's suicide note.

The mystic Carnicelli now required

another vessel for his ABC ambitions, so switched focus across the border he hoped one day to erase and sought to cast his spell over Juan Perón instead. Incredibly, he succeeded.⁷

Over in Argentina, leadership of what became known as the Anael Lodge passed to an auctioneer named Héctor Caviglia, who knew Perón personally and acted as an intermediary between him and Vargas's followers in Brazil. Caviglia, impressed by his charisma, developed a fantastic theory that Juan Perón's hands were actually a form of disguised radar dishes, able to capture astral rays from the stars above, which he then broadcast out to his adoring public in turn when standing on the balcony of the Casa Rosada and waving at them, leading Caviglia to dub his hero 'The Cosmic Conductor of Argentina'. The invisible rays emitted from his hands would transmute his voters' souls, just as the rays from Tommy Hicks's hands could cure their gammy knees, allowing the citizenry to evolve into a new form of Nazi-echoing *übermenschen* who would seize geopolitical control from the US, UK and USSR, ushering humanity into the dawning Age of Aquarius. As well as an angel, Anael was now a fixed star, too, beaming evolutionary waves down to Earth to combat Marxism and capitalism alike, creating Heaven on Earth and so embodying the old hermetic doctrine of 'As Above, So Below'. Following Caviglia's death in 1964, leadership of the Lodge passed to a Perónist lawyer and judge named Julio César Urien; Anael himself had personally anointed Urien as boss one dark and stormy night. As Urien added to Lodge lore, it now transpired his guardian angel's name was really an

acronym, ANAEL, or Advanced Nationalist Argentina in Liberation (in English that would actually spell ANAL),⁸ which pithily summed up Urien's desired geopolitical programme.⁹

However, in 1955 the transmission of revolutionary rays had already been unavoidably interrupted by Perón being overthrown in yet another military coup, with the mobile radio-mast seeking refuge in exile in the fascist-friendly paradise of Spain under the (slightly grudging) ægis of Hitler's old chum General Franco, the original *caudillo* whom all his later jackbooted South American kin sought to imitate. Perón's reduced situation now reflected precisely that of Getúlio Vargas post-1945, with the isolated former leader potentially being vulnerable to influence from a smooth-talking occultist only too eager to whisper prophecies of future greatness into his ear like one of the Weird Sisters leading Macbeth on to his doom. Whereas the cultists had once tried to get at Vargas through his superstitious daughter, they now tried to access Perón through his equally gullible Evita-replacing wife Isabel Perón, very much the Lady Macbeth in this whole tragedy.

By now, the reader may naturally have concluded the original model for The Sorcerer of Luisa Valenzuela must have been one of the unholy occult trinity of Carnicelli, Caviglia or Urien: but no. Instead, as we shall see next time, at this point a new Prospero materialised on the stage, causing an outbreak of murderous mayhem every bit as hubristic as anything Shakespeare ever imagined – and, just like his spherically over-endowed fictional counterpart in *The Lizard's Tail*, this guy certainly had some balls.

NOTES

1 A pyramid really has four sides, because of its base, but as The Generalissimo has two wives, who are potentially considered one, the 'trinity' here sort of has four sides at the same time as having three, thus being 3D pyramid and 2D triangle simultaneously: that you can play around with the elements and make whatever you like out of such arbitrary numerology is, I think, Valenzuela's point here.

2 Luisa Valenzuela, *The Lizard's Tail*, Serpent's Tail (appropriate publisher!), 1987, p.256; www.dalkeyarchive.com/a-conversation-with-luisa-valenzuela-by-evelyn-picon-garfield/; www.culturematters.org.uk/index.php/arts/poetry/itemlist/tag/Peron. A 'lizard's tail' is the name given to their favoured whip by South American military torturers, as well as sounding like an ingredient in a witch's cauldron. Another of Valenzuela's books is called *Strange Things Happen Here*, which sounds about right in an Argentinian context.

3 Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Black Sun: Aryan Cults, Esoteric Nazism and the Politics of Identity*, New York University Press, 2002, pp.183-4, 336; www.infobae.com/sociedad/2019/05/30/la-asombrosa-historia-del-criminal-nazi-protégido-por-peron-que-dio-clases-de-racismo-en-dos-universidades-argentinas/; www.jasoncolavito.com/blog/jacques-de-mahieu-daughter-in-law-is-mad-at-me-for-reporting-facts-about-jacques-de-mahieu/; www.mundoandino.com/Argentina/Jacques-de-Mahieu. The excellent term 'fascistoid' has been coined to describe Perón's rule, a word I would dearly like to see enter the actual dictionary.

4 <http://what-when-how.com/religious-movements/escuela-cientifica-basilio-religious-movement/>; <https://laternalrosario.wordpress.com/2019/02/15/el-peronismo-esoterico-parte-1/>; http://second.wiki/wiki/relacica3b3n_iglesia_catc3b3lica-estado_artentino_1943-1955#1950:_

el_gobierno_se_afianza;jstor.org/stable/41799916; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church%E2%80%93State_relations_in_Argentina; <https://religionnews.com/1996/12/27/top-story-the-starlet-who-made-herself-a-saint-who-was-the-real-evita/>

5 <https://espiritusanto.com/ar/biografia-de-tommy-hicks>; <https://romans1015.com/1954-argentina-revival/>; <https://history.stackexchange.com/questions/62323/did-argentine-president-juan-peron-grant-free-access-to-the-radio-the-press-and>

6 Anael (also Hanael) means 'Joy of God', and is the Hebrew equivalent of the name 'Hannibal'. One of the seven archangels in traditional Jewish lore, Anael is usually associated with Venus, although Carnicelli – who sometimes liked to pose as the angel's incarnation – seems to have stolen his identity from the ritual texts of Count Cagliostro's Egyptian Rite Freemasonry, where he is linked

instead to the Sun. Egyptians, of course, are indelibly associated with pyramids, and the pyramid became the Lodge's chief occult symbol. Thus, you could reasonably argue the Lodge was quasi-Masonic in nature, albeit in a very atypical way. See <http://nacionalismo-catolicongnp.blogspot.com/2016/10/la-vertiente-ocultista-del-peronismo-la.html>.

7 <https://quienfuera Borges.blogspot.com/2018/08/getulio-vargas-historias-de-su-ocaso-i.html?m=1>.

8 I am reminded of Mary Whitehouse's sadly apocryphal 'Clean Up National Television' campaign group. The original Spanish-language elaboration of the acronym ANAEL does feature a word beginning with a capitalised 'E'.

9 <https://laternalrosario.wordpress.com/2019/02/15/el-peronismo-esoterico-parte-1/>; www.magicasruinas.com/ar/revistero/3/logia-anael.htm

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The Cup, the cortege and the curse

CLAIRE DAVY explains how an irate priest put the kibosh on Mayo's All-Ireland winning hopes for over 70 years...

Jane Austen, in *Pride and Prejudice*, famously suggests “that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife” – but there is a particular single man who is desired by all the women of Co. Mayo – and its men too! He is no handsome Lothario emerging dripping from a lake, like Mr Darcy. Rather he stands just 16in (40cm) tall, weighs a sprightly 12lb (5.4kg), and is known simply as ‘Sam’. And he has caused more heartache and tear-stained pillows across this Irish west coast county over the past 70 years than any febrile love affair.

‘Sam’ is, in fact, a sporting trophy: specifically, the Sam Maguire Cup, which is awarded each year to the winners of the All-Ireland Senior Gaelic Football Championship. This hotly-contested holy grail of Irish football is handed to the team that comes out on top of the 32 counties at the end of the season in September. Traditionally, on the third Sunday of each September, the captain of the winning team climbs the stone steps of Croke Park stadium, Dublin, the home of Gaelic games in Ireland, and stares, transfixed for a moment or two, at Sam’s gilded curves, before picking up the microphone to say, in Gaelic, something along the lines of “Ladies and Gentlemen, I am delighted to take this trophy on behalf of the [victorious county’s name] team”. Sadly, for myself and hundreds of thousands of fans around the world, the last time we heard these words spoken for County Mayo was on 23 September 1951, as they fell from the lips of team captain



The priest at the head of the funeral procession was apoplectic



Sean Flanagan (later Minister for Health and MEP for Ireland).

And while that moment, in the setting sun of an autumnal Dublin evening, was undoubtedly a high point in the sporting history of this beautiful, remote county, it has long served as preamble to what came next. For as the victorious convoy left the stadium at the start of its long journey back to the west, celebrations began in earnest. Beer bottles were cracked open and songs and music rang out as the line of hooting and revving cars passed from county to county and on home into Mayo. Ahead of it, each town would have bonfires lit along the roadside to welcome the victors and the spoils, and whole communities would cram the grass verges and ditches to

pay homage to their returning heroes.

On reaching the town of Foxford (a good four hours into the journey on modern thoroughfares, but probably double that on those primitive roads) the party met an oncoming funeral cortege. Irish tradition and custom (usually impeccably observed by all ages, even at the time of writing) decreed that the footballers should pause their journey, step down from the vehicle, and stand with heads bowed while the cortege passed alongside them. That simple respect paid, they could have re-joined the party and this story would likely never have been told.

Unfortunately, for the team, the euphoria of victory and the ebullience of the occasion trumped religious and social mores. They kept partying and sped past the funeral cortege. The priest at the head of the procession was apoplectic – and cursed them! He said that Mayo would never again win an All-Ireland title until the last remaining member of that team had died.

Since then, Mayo have advanced to several finals but have never held ‘Sam’ since that day in 1951. Whether or not you hold with religion or fate; whether you see the entire story as coincidence, chilling lesson or even total fabrication, it’s hard – despite some undeniably joyful

LEFT: The victorious County Mayo team in 1951. Paddy Prendergast is in the front row, third from the right. BELOW LEFT: The Sam Maguire Cup.

moments of escapism and hope – to be a Mayo fan. It’s hard, as an 11-year-old in 1989 watching another defeat on television, the sound of the final whistle prompting your usually placid mother to dash a poor teddy-bear against a stone fireplace in frustration, and then calmly help to pick up the fluff as your little sister storms upstairs in tears swearing an immediate (and impressively ongoing) hatred of the game that brought about poor Teddy’s demise. It’s even more challenging when it’s 2021 and you’re 42 watching from the pub and there is one – YES! ONE! – remaining 1951 team member still alive and the side Mayo are facing are thought to be average at best. BUT HE IS ALIVE! And so Mayo are not on form and, once again, it is not their day. “We go again!” we always say – Mayo fans are passionate and loyal and completely bloody stubborn – we WILL go again and we WILL triumph....

Paddy Prendergast, the last remaining team member from 1951, died two weeks after Mayo lost that 2021 final to Tyrone. So, 2022 should be our year... Dear Paddy didn’t believe in the curse, and quite surprisingly didn’t live out his golden years in a rural safe-house hidden away from irate Mayo season ticket-holders desperate to get their hands on ‘Sam’. But if we do win this year and our captain gets to say those honeyed words, the great man will assuredly rest slightly easier. Meanwhile... “We go again!”

◆ **CLAIRE DAVY** is an aspiring writer from Ireland, currently living in the UK. She is a member of the Ghost Club and SPR and sits on the executive committee of ASSAP. She has given talks for ASSAP (see the organisation’s YouTube channel) and has written for *Haunted* magazine and the Spooky Isles website. She can be contacted at clomalley@yahoo.co.uk.

“By magicians, for magicians...”

LYNN PICKNETT and CLIVE PRINCE celebrate London's Atlantis Bookshop at 100

In the 1970s when a fuse board kept blowing and all the lights went out, Amado Crowley – who dubiously said he was Aleister's secret son (see **FT414:32-37**) – announced he would claim he'd done it, just as his 'father' had, it is said, caused the books to disappear in Watkins bookshop. But Atlantis Bookshop's owner, Geraldine Beskin, responded briskly: “If you're going to set up a myth about the place can I have a better one than that?”

Actually, Atlantis Bookshop, just down the road from the British Museum, is in no need of extra legends; it's a big enough one all by itself, being, apart from many other things, the oldest occult bookshop not only in the UK but in the world. Atlantis is one of London's big three esoteric bookshops, along with Watkins in Covent Garden and Treadwell's, also, like Atlantis, in Bloomsbury. Although Watkins was founded in the 1890s, Geraldine points out it only began selling books on magick in the 1980s, whereas, as her daughter and co-owner of the shop, Bali, says firmly: “We've always been magickal.”

In its centenary year, this emporium of occult delights has never been more popular with its devoted followers and passing tourists alike. In fact, it's much more than a bookshop – it's a hub for keeping magick alive.

The shop always has a celebratory ambience, though its 100th birthday party in March was extra special, spilling out onto the Museum Street pavement, with the approval of its neighbours and friends. Like all their celebrations – including our own book launches – it was joyous and warmly welcoming. We were delighted to join in raising a glass to the shop's next 100 years.



ABOVE: A paradise for esoterically inclined browsers. BELOW: A 'witch's cauldron' in honour of Geraldine's mother, Kath.

In fact, it's always been rather a special place to both of us. Memorably, it was where Clive bought his first ever copy of *Fortean Times*, when it was one of the only places *FT* could be obtained over the counter, rather than by subscription. That was back in 1980 – and of course he still has it (Issue 31). As Bali cheekily points out, that was before she was born. And even before that, Lynn was living round the corner in Great Russell Street and often popped into the shop.

Atlantis was established in 1922 by Michael Houghton and Raphael Hurst (pen name Paul Brunton), and soon became a hub for London's esoteric and artistic scene of the interwar years. Hurst left on his global wanderings, first to India, in search of mystical knowledge, which he enshrined in a series of books that first brought subjects like yoga to British readers. The original shop was in Lamb's Conduit Street, then moved to Bury Street and then, when that took a direct hit in the Blitz, to its present location.

But the shop's relationship with today's owners has its roots as

Atlantis soon became a hub for London's esoteric and artistic scene



far back as the late 1950s when Geraldine's father, Wally Collins, bought it. This seemed fated: the first time he had visited it, Houghton – with his reputation for spot-on, snap insights – said, “Take a good look round – you'll own this one day.” Geraldine would come in with her dad during the

school holidays, recalling that the shop back then was warren-like and dimly lit – very unlike today's bright and inviting space.

The Beskins have always both owned and worked in Atlantis, despite the struggles of maintaining an independent shop in the heart of London. They're very much hands-on and have turned down offers from would-be buyers who wanted to install them as employees.

After her father died, Geraldine joined her mother Kath working in the shop. For a while, all was well; but then a threat arrived that no one had seen coming: the ‘Satanic Panic’ of the 1980s and 1990s. The Satanic Ritual Abuse scare was imported from the USA, and saw hundreds of children removed by social workers from their parents on the wildest of allegations. The tabloid press fuelled the suspicion that anyone involved in the occult – all obviously diabolical – must be Satanic child abusers.

As Geraldine now had her young daughter Bali to consider, she realised there was a real possibility of her being taken into care just because her mum ran



ABOVE: Magickal paraphernalia among the many books. ABOVE RIGHT: Three generations of Atlanteans (l-r): Bali, Aurora and Geraldine. BELOW: Happy 100th!

an occult bookshop. Such things were not unknown. Faced with the risk of losing her, she remembers, “the shop was the thing I had to sacrifice.” With a heavy heart she sold Atlantis, initially to *Psychic News*, who subsequently sold it on.

The Beskins maintained ties, though, continuing to organise events such as the 1987 exhibition of Austin Osman Spare’s artwork. Another was a staging, in 1990, of the Rites of Eleusis by, among others, occulture icon Genesis P-Orridge and co – they came on naked and stuck feathers on each others’ genitals.

Then in 2002, on casually popping into the shop, Geraldine and Bali learned that the then owners were looking to sell. Bali says: “The opportunity arose and so we took it. And it was a decision we literally made in a heartbeat.”

At the time, Bali was studying for a degree in Business Administration and, as she says wryly, “I thought I’d write a business plan and put it all together. But *all* my lecturers went: ‘It’s not going to work. You’re working with your Mum, you’re studying, you don’t live in London, you don’t know what you’re buying.’” But the shop clearly had other ideas – and its future was in no doubt.

Bali tells how, aged about three, she was sitting on her grandmother’s knee behind the till, and looked around saying, “One day this will be mine”. And Kath kissed her and said, “Of course it will, my darling.” But

now there’s a fourth-generation Beskin waiting in the wings to keeping the female tradition going: Aurora, who’s three.

Very soon the shop established its authentic ethos. Unlike other similar emporia, Atlantis doesn’t do New Age, only occult. While you have a dizzying choice of Tarot cards to buy, you won’t be offered readings here. And Geraldine is blunt about the nature of their clientele: “Mystics are seekers, magicians are finders.” Bali adds: “We’re for the finders.”

Warming to a cherished theme, Geraldine chips in: “Bali and I have always been proud that we’ve always been true to our core subject, that we’ve never been trendy. We were set up by magicians for magicians to have an involvement with the Western Mysteries. And that’s what we do.”

They’ve certainly had occult prime-movers through their doors over the years, including Gerald Gardner, the great pioneer of Wicca – Geraldine points out it’s “the only religion the UK has ever given to the world” – whose seminal novel *High Magic’s Aid* (1949) was published by Atlantis. It presented witchcraft rituals in fictional form because it was the only way it could be done legally back then: the 18th-century

Witchcraft Act was still in force.

During this dangerous time, Gardner held meetings of his coven in Atlantis’s basement. In fact, Geraldine muses that Wicca might have never happened if it hadn’t been for their basement.

The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn also met there, and among the literary, artistic and occult celebrities who’ve crossed the threshold are Dion Fortune, Tolkien, WB Yeats, Aleister Crowley (of course), and the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. And today it’s still a magnet for many luminaries and big names from the literary, artistic, theatrical and musical worlds.

Among them is Jaz Coleman of the Crowley-inspired band Killing Joke – “the magickal entity of music”, as Geraldine puts it. She was interviewed in the shop for the 2014 documentary about the band, *The Death and Resurrection Show*. And it was not unknown for books to be sent round to the Beatles’ Apple Records offices. But don’t expect any juicy celeb stories – the Atlantis ladies’ discretion is legendary.

You don’t have to be famous to be welcomed at Atlantis. You don’t even have to buy a book. As Geraldine says, “Here, weirdly, there doesn’t have to be a

monetary exchange. It’s often an emotional exchange. That’s a vital part of what we do.”

We can attest to that. Immediately after the first lockdown we popped by, eager to touch base after the shop’s near-absence in our lives. We weren’t the only ones: a steady stream of friends and fans came by – often with cake – to bask once more in the shop’s special brand of what Geraldine calls “old-fashioned good fellowship”.

Geraldine and Bali know their subject in depth but wear their knowledge lightly, chatting just as easily to browsing tourists as to high mages. Bali says, “We’re a safe space. You can walk in and discuss literally anything,” while Geraldine adds, “It’s a two-way thing.” And the shop turning 100 has galvanised them even more: many new projects and more exciting publishing ventures are planned. “Watch this space,” Geraldine says.

But what a space it already is... Of course, there are all sorts of rumours about the shop. It’s said that a basement trapdoor leads to the tunnels of Cthulhu (HP Lovecraft’s cthonic spirit). Bali firmly denies it: “The rumbling is the Tube.”

Oh, really? If you say so...

◆ LYNN PICKNETT AND CLIVE PRINCE

are longtime FT contributors and the authors of *The Templar Revelation* (1997), *Stargate Conspiracy* (2001), *The Masks of Christ* (2008) and *When God Had a Wife* (2019).



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Believing in bad luck

Coincidences do happen, **Bob Rickard** finds in this very readable study, but it can often feel as if they have a maleficent cause behind them

Curses, Coincidences & Malign Influence

A Parapsychological Perspective

Peter A McCue

Abrams Academic 2021

Pb, 195pp, £9.95, ISBN 9781845497941

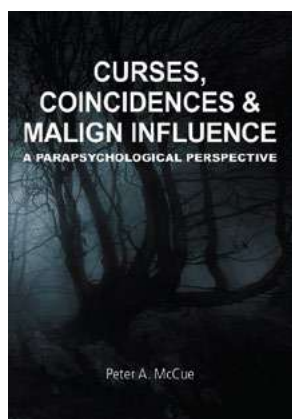
Many cultures, including archaic ones, have some notion of luck. It seems to be a fundamental component of what psychologists and anthropologists call “magical thinking”. The feeling arises that someone else’s luck somehow diminishes your own (gamblers often believe this). Frustrations – whether from failure and loss or illness and death – are blamed upon antagonistic forces deliberately targeting you with a curse.

Throughout history different societies have evolved methods of protection from misfortune; the very word associates curses with bad luck. Simple prophylactic actions have become part of our social repertoire – sayings (“Bless you” after sneezing), actions (crossing fingers), images (a St Christopher medal) and so on – are used to ward off curses, prevent them or to reflect them back to their origin. Historical and cultural variants often have ancient roots (eg English farmers planting thorny bushes on hilltops to prevent the night riding of witches, covering mirrors after a death, or the widespread preoccupation with the “evil eye” or “overlooking”). Methods of attracting or cultivating luck follow the same logic and vary from the benign (nailing a horseshoe above a threshold) to the horror of the African trade in *muti* amulets to secure “success” (see FT240:8, 260:22-23).

Peter McCue, a clinical psychologist, has examined the thinking behind such feelings

and actions from the perspective of a researcher into paranormal and anomalous phenomena. This lends his treatment some rigour, despite the scorn of “rationalist” sceptics who dismiss the entirety of it as “merely” the product of excitable and credulous imaginations and therefore not worthy of scholarly attention.

McCue’s approach is novel, balanced and wide-ranging. He has identified a common denominator in these types of behaviour as the human fascination with not just coincidences but *meaningful* coincidences. It seems that humans are hardwired to see patterns and meanings in our modes of perception; it is an automatic (possibly instinctive) part of everyday perception. If that process fails to see any pattern, our imagination steps in to invent or imagine one. Because these arise in the mind, not from



the natural observation, they inevitably seem personal and “meaningful”.

Psychologists already have a word for the process of misperceiving a meaning “where there is none” – *pareidolia* – but among the sceptics this tends to be used pejoratively with the implication that the percipient is either a

Humans are hardwired to see patterns and meanings in our modes of perception

fool, being fooled or deliberately misconstruing. However, labelling this mysterious process is not the same as explaining it, and suggestion is not *inevitably* a pathological process.

This brings us to the core of McCue’s work, which he bases upon a large number of case summaries, including his own investigations. Firstly, he acknowledges that coincidences – simply denoting two or more things occurring together – really do occur, regardless of speculation about the “mechanism” involved. Secondly, he classifies “curses” into two distinct types. The majority arise during everyday life; the deleterious consequences *seeming* to derive from natural (if unexpected) causes such as illness or accident. Then we have cases which seem quite *extraordinary* and are often associated with “paranormal” events. In the annals of both witchcraft and hauntings, notes McCue, the single most common rationalisation by “victims” is that they *must have been cursed* in some way.

Next – and this is of great interest to fortune tellers and others who study such things – he broadens his remit to include ufological and paranormal phenomena such as telepathy, precognition and poltergeist cases; McCue observes that a significant proportion of such narratives involve apparent coincidences relating to the “triggering” or “onset” of the experiences. In complex or

serial cases, witnesses (or narrators) have a sense that some sort of intelligence lies behind the patterns and meanings. McCue is brave to tackle this aspect, and it is necessary to note that he is not out to prove the actual existence of disembodied or extraterrestrial entities. His interest is that *a belief in them* is the significant recurring motif in such narratives (and that won’t please some ufologists, ghost-hunters or, we might add, cryptozoologists).

McCue argues that a significant coincidence occurs when a person believes that their perception of paranormal events (of any of those kinds mentioned) becomes, at any point, directly and personally meaningful to them, and he asks whether it is possible to find any kind of “vector” for that relationship. A good portion of his book tries to deconstruct the fears around “curses” from the anxiety engendered by a misunderstanding of coincidence. He calls these apparently meaningful coincidences, “strange coincidences” and believes that their psychological actuality is an integral part of all curse-like phenomena. He is convinced that “if some curses are ‘real’ then clearly they involve paranormal phenomena”.

To his credit, McCue acknowledges that the nature of “evidence” supporting interventions by reactive and “tricksterish intelligences” (as so often observed in poltergeist cases) is both a complicated and a difficult issue. This pioneering work is feeling its way forward, maintaining a grounded discussion while introducing (for the general reader) ideas about quantum-level psychical processes. Don’t let that deter you; it’s also a good read.

★★★★★

Simply phenomenal!

David Sutton finds a treasure trove of fortean funnies in this wonderful collection

Phenomenomix

Hunt Emerson

Knockabout Press 2022

Pb, 224pp, £22.99, ISBN 9780861662906

Even after working on FT for well over two decades, some things never, as they say, get old. One of those things is the arrival, every four weeks, of a new “Phenomenomix” strip from our resident cartoonist, Hunt Emerson. Sometimes, if we’ve discussed what’s coming up in the next issue, I’ll have an inkling of what might be in store; sometimes, as with Hunt’s recent strip on fishfalls (FT420:71), it’s a case of serendipitous synchronicity (or “the hive mind as work”, as Hunt suggests); most often, it’s a delightful surprise. After all, we could be dealing with cryptozoological classics, oddities of history, the miracles of lesser known saints, or, as brought together in a previous (highly recommended) collection of Hunt’s FT work, *Lives of the Great Occultists*.

Whatever the topic, though, the treatment is always pure Hunt: visually, a blend of classic *Mad Magazine*-style cartooning and the freewheeling, surrealism of underground comix, plus his unique ability to address the outer limits of human experience with a very down to earth sense of irony.

Hunt has been part of the FT team since Bob Rickard launched the mag (then known as *The News*) way back in 1973; the story of how the two of them met is retold in a wonderful four-page special Hunt created for our 40th anniversary in 2013 – fittingly, the first strip in this new collection. His earliest work was providing wildly inventive subject headings

for Bob’s columns in issue eight (“Strange Encounters”, “Lights and Fireballs”, “Embeddings” and so on); for issue 11 he contributed his first full strip, “Fortean Funnies” (“more or less incomprehensible – I had a lot to learn about drawing comics!”). “Phenomenomix” debuted in issue 30 (1979), and in issue 42 he gave us the first adventure of that dogged but hapless investigator of anomalies, Gully Bull. (My own favourite Gully strip is “A Dreadful Night”, in which our hero’s attempt to solve one mystery results in him creating a host of new ones, as he is mistaken for a lake monster and accidentally creates a simulacrum of Christ on a wall!)

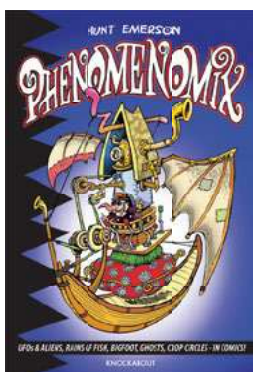
Since then, Hunt has created a full-page strip for nearly every

subsequent issue (only missing a couple through ill health). Reading through this collection, I’m struck anew by his sheer invention and ability to transmute wordy fortean subject matter – from old anomalistic chestnuts to current debates – into cartoon gold. Just glancing at the

titles of the strips gives you an idea of the range of topics he’s tackled: Men in Black, Ley Lines, Spontaneous Human Combustion, Trepanning, Thunderstones, Mass Panic, The Hollow Earth... There’s so much crammed into these 200-plus full-colour pages that you’ll just have to jump in yourself and find your own favourites. My one small complaint is that it would have been nice to have an indication of which issue of FT each strip originally appeared in; just saying.

Two final thoughts: I’m amazed at just how many great cartoons Hunt has created for us over the years, many of which I’d forgotten; and, we really are blessed to have him!

★★★★★



The Rohonc Code

Tracing a Historical Riddle

Benedek Láng

Penn State University 2021

Pb, 176pp, £19.95, ISBN 9780271090207

Codes and cyphers have an enduring appeal for professional researchers and amateur sleuths alike. Think the Rosetta Stone, the Voynich Manuscript, Linear A or the Phaistos Disc.

The Rohonc Codex, one of the lesser known and as yet unsolved codes, was discovered in the library of the eponymous Hungarian city in 1838. Since then, researchers have struggled to decode its message, figure out its meaning and divine its real purpose.

The Rohonc Code: Tracing a Historical Riddle is Benedek Láng’s personal account of this 448-page coded document, encompassing how he has sought to understand it and documenting in depth the theories of other researchers who have also attempted to decrypt the code.

He observes in his first sentence, “The success of an investigation depends on how skilfully you can make objects talk,” and goes on to describe his own initiation with the codex of the title. For Láng, as for so many others before him, the subject became an obsession.

As a professor at Budapest University of Technology and Economics, the author avoids the jumps of logic that one might find in similar works by amateurs. There’s a reassuring certainty that we’re not being led on some wild goose chase.

This is solid historical research, yet written in a style to make the reader want to read on. The chapter “Writing in Cyphers and Codes”, in particular, provides a valuable perspective on codes and cryptographers, especially through the early modern period. Throughout this enthralling exploration, Láng examines the possibilities that the document might be an artificial language or a cypher or perhaps a shorthand system of some kind.

And if it is not a “real” artefact, then is it a forgery or clever hoax? If so, then suspicion might fall on Sámuel Literáti Nemes, a notorious antiquarian, responsi-



ble for falsifying documents in the early part of the 19th century. Avoiding spoilers, I won’t reveal Láng’s conclusions on the Rohonc Codex.

Marcus Williamson

★★★★★

Supernatural America

The Paranormal in American Art

ed. Robert Cozzolino

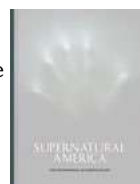
University of Chicago Press 2021

Hb, 346pp, £40, ISBN 9780226786827

Unexplained experiences have been a central and completely overlooked aspect of American art and the lives of countless artists. A pioneering exhibition, *Supernatural America: The Paranormal in American Art* (see FT409:6-7), was the first to examine the relationship between American artists and the supernatural; this weighty, richly-illustrated book from the show is an object of beauty in its own right.

The words “supernatural” and “paranormal” are defined as any experiences or phenomena beyond scientific explanation that suggest an order of existence beyond the visible and observable Universe and that appear to transcend the laws of nature. The survey ranges widely, from 19th-century spirit photography, through neo-classical depictions of angels hovering over the slaughtered on the battlefield, to more modern evocations of voodoo ceremonies. The book takes all of these artists’ experiences – however bizarre – seriously, while positing that the works can often be understood metaphorically when placed within the broader spiritual and political contexts of their day.

The problem art historians have had with spirituality is slowly being redressed with the recent re-evaluation of the work of such artists as Hilma af Klint. If religion has been disquieting to largely secular modern art criticism, one can only celebrate the courage it has taken to summon these works out of dark storerooms and to re-cast American art history in a more esoteric light. There are even surprises here from well-known painters, the spectral art of which





may have been suppressed: Whistler's *Arrangement in Black (The Lady in the Yellow Buskin)* is an otherworldly portrait of a society woman emerging from, or sinking into, existential blackness; Albert Pinkham Ryder depicts death galloping upon a translucent horse on a race track; Grant Wood offers a premonition of imminent carnage as a large truck bounces round a blind bend. All of the works, whatever the degree of fame of their creators, reveal how deeply ingrained the supernatural and paranormal are in American art and how the fascination with them connects artists whose works have not ordinarily been seen alongside each other.

This book affords art lovers outside America the opportunity to view a truly extraordinary collection of some 160 paintings and objects that we've been missing for more than two centuries.

Rob Weinberg

★★★★★

Spare Parts

A Surprising History of Transplants

Paul Craddock

Fig Tree 2021

Hb, 320pp, £18.99, ISBN 9780241370254

In the late 1930s, Soviet scientist Sergei Brukhonenko kept a severed dog's head alive with the aid of a bypass machine. As Paul Craddock points out in his lively history of transplant surgery, the film of Brukhonenko's experiment was dismissed at the time as Communist propaganda and never conclusively proved (nor disproved). The film also epitomises many of the themes of *Spare Parts*, with grand claims of medics bumping up against ethical concerns, where the pantheon of medical discoveries is built upon extremely bloody foundations.

Craddock is aware of the pitfalls of writing on surgery's past, stating his book is not a triumphant march of "technical progress leading to mastery", nor one detailing "ghoulish curiosities". This is hardly a lifeless account, though; its clear narrative contains enough dramatic human detail and lesser-known facts to fully justify the claim to be "a surprising history".

He is good on social context, too. He shows why long-held

thinking on the workings of the body were slow to change after William Harvey's discoveries on the circulation of blood and Renaissance developments in skin grafting. He frames experiments into blood transfusion in late 17th-century France and England around increasing rivalries between national scientific societies. Most interestingly, Craddock makes a strong case for how the trade in teeth, being transplanted from working-class children to upper-class adults, fits perfectly into the increasing consumerist economy of late 18th-century Britain.

He also examines surgical "heroes" in a more critical light, for instance showing how the egotistical Christian Barnard took advantage of laxer South African regulation to source the heart that became the first to be successfully transplanted.

Craddock's history of transplantation brings out both what we have in common and what makes us unique, leading to questions about what makes us more than the sum of our replaceable parts. It's clearly a story that's far from over, but also one with resonances from the past: is there that much difference between 18th-century teeth transplantation and the more globalised 21st-century bio-economy of illegal organ trafficking?

However, it is a pity that Craddock's adept reading of how 17th and 18th-century culture was influenced by transplantation is not matched in his discussion of the 19th and 20th centuries. It's odd that there's no mention of, say, *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, nor, given how increasingly common it became, of other uses of the transplantation trope in the science fiction and horror genres.

Ross MacFarlane

★★★★★

Philosophy of Psychedelics

Chris Letheby

Oxford University Press 2021

Hb, 272pp, £24.99, ISBN 9780198843122

A growing body of medical studies suggest that careful administration of psychedelic drugs such as psilocybin (the active ingredient in magic mushrooms)

and mescaline (as popularised by Aldous Huxley) provides significant and lasting benefits in the treatment of depression, anxiety and addiction. Moreover, these studies have also found that clinical efficacy is strongly correlated with the subject's "mystical experience" – variously described as a sense of ego-dissolution, direct encounter with the divine, or simply a glimpse into what Alan Watts called the "Joyous Cosmology" underlying everyday reality. Having a good trip really seems to matter, and is often a better predictor of treatment outcomes than more objectively quantifiable variables including dosage strength. And this raises some puzzles. Does the success of psychedelic therapy provide evidence for some deep metaphysical truths? Or is it merely a comforting delusion for those unable to cope with reality?

Letheby's book attempts to develop a naturalistic explanation of psychedelic therapy – but one that nevertheless takes the phenomenology seriously, rather than dismissing it as mere drug-addled hallucination. In his account, psychedelics work not by revealing hidden truths about ultimate reality, but by challenging some of our entrenched views about ourselves; or more technically, by disrupting the deep-rooted predictive models the brain develops to systematise experience. Psychedelics disturb these models, and our conceptual distinctions really do dissolve into the "oceanic boundlessness" often described by patients. But only a positive, subjective engagement with the experience – having a good trip – will enable the patient to "rebuild" the ego in a more positive manner.

Philosophy of Psychedelics is primarily intended for an academic audience; the discussion of neurological mechanisms probably offers more detail than the casual reader desires. But it is clearly written, with an accessible overview of a wealth of recent studies, and while it explicitly undertakes to naturalise the "mystical" elements of psychedelic usage, it is nevertheless refreshing to see the phenomenological data taken seriously. There is much thought-provoking material here for those interested in taking a more

conventional journey through the doors of perception.

Paul Dicken

★★★★★

Witchcraft

ed. Jessica Hundley & Pam Grossman

Taschen 2021

Hb, 520pp, £30, ISBN 9783836585606

Witchcraft is the third in Taschen's Library of Esoterica series, and is as stunning as its predecessors, *Astrology* and *Tarot*.

"Witchcraft is culled from countless cultural and ancestral influences," says series editor Jessica Hundley. "Rituals can be passed down or self-created. We hope to showcase and celebrate witches in all their multiple manifestations."

The book is gorgeously illustrated in colour on almost every page, with mediæval woodcuts, Pre-Raphaelite paintings (John William Waterhouse's *The Magic Circle* and *Circe Offering the Cup to Ulysses*, just in the first few pages) and a wide range of photographs, including from Stewart Farrar's coven. The text is well-researched and thoughtfully written; the opening chapter on History sensibly says that 50,000 to 80,000 people, "a large percentage of them women", were executed for witchcraft between 1500 and 1660, rather than the often-touted fictional figure of millions. The development of modern witchcraft is briefly but clearly put in its setting of the 19th and early 20th-century occult movement: the Golden Dawn, Crowley, Margaret Murray, Gerald Gardner, Dion Fortune, up to more recent figures like Starhawk.

The text covers a vast amount, from the witch's year to varieties of magick to the Elements – but it's the illustrations that are the heart of this book: engravings by Albrecht Dürer, paintings by Henry Fuseli, William Blake, Evelyn de Morgan, Arthur Rackham and 20th-century occult artists including Austin Osman Spare, Ithell Colquhoun, Leonora Carrington and Cameron. The book finishes with a section on the influence of modern witch concepts on fashion, pop culture, film and TV.

David V Barrett

★★★★★



On the dark side

From hag-riding to corpse roads to phantom black dogs, **Andy Paciorek** finds darkness a-plenty in this bewitching array of fortaean lore

Dark Folklore

Mark Norman & Tracey Norman

The History Press 2021

Hb, 174pp, £14.99, ISBN 9780750998017

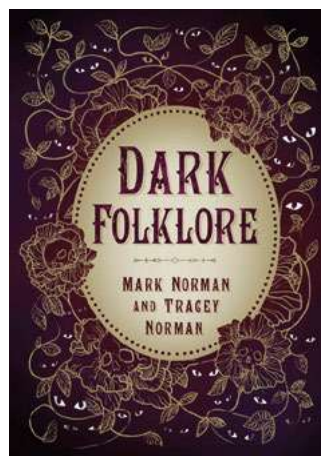
There is certainly darkness a-plenty within the world of folklore; what Chthonic treasures will be found in *Dark Folklore*? Its five chapters offer a bewitching array of lore with fortaean interest.

The first chapter, “The Old Hag: Folklore and Sleep Paralysis”, provides a very good overview covering the bases of superstition, psychoanalysis and scientific rationale. Presented are numerous entities associated with the hag-riding phenomenon and aspects of sleep disturbance in world folklore, from the Hungarian Liderc to the Arabian Quarinah and the Alien Grays. The authors put forward balanced and insightful consideration of the subject, without judgement. They explain the medical processes of such unsettling experiences but don’t merely dismiss the entities envisioned, rather questioning why a feeling of somnolent physical inertia and laboured breathing (amongst other symptoms) can result in visions of old crones or other strange entities squatting on the sufferers’ chests or dark mysterious figures lingering in the corners of the room. Archetypal consideration is applied here, as is the rich folklore of myriad nocturnal entities that can be found across the world in both developing and more technologically advanced societies.

Chapter two deals with “The Dark Church” and covers wide-reaching examples of association mostly between the Christian church in Britain and superstition and pagan influence. Discussed are foliate heads and Sheela-na-gig carvings, St Mark’s Eve vigils (whereby observers may see a procession of those destined to die in the following year) and other wondrous delights. Here we wander down corpse roads and meet the

priests of Devon who reputedly employed rather than denied folk magic. The magician-priests included the Rev Franke Parker, who had an esoteric library that he was deeply protective of and whom folklore declares had the power to shape-shift. The peculiar Parson Parker was reportedly once found at rest in a bed surrounded by dead toads.

“Folk Ghosts” provide the focus of the third chapter, which considers the distinction that should be made more in haunt studies between ghosts that exist purely in lore and those reported



to have been experienced by verifiable witnesses. Many places are said to be haunted by a phantom stagecoach or phantom black dog for instance, but how many have known contemporary witnesses of the particular phenomenon? “Cockstride ghosts”, the spirits of those destined to perform some impossible or potentially eternal penance for an earthly crime, are also given attention. Weaving rope from grains of sand or emptying large pools with a leaking diminutive vessel are examples of such posthumous burdens that may befall wicked souls.

The Normans move on to “Urban Legends” and contemplation of their history, endurance and evolution from the era of Spring-heeled Jack through the Edwardian case of the Cottingley Fairy photographs, to the

supposed radio and televisual panics of the broadcasts of *War of The Worlds* and *Ghostwatch* to the virtual “fakelore” creations taking on a real-world presence and influence in the digital age such as Slender Man and the Momo Challenge, perfectly showing that folklore is not simply an historical study but a living, developing part of human culture.

In the final chapter, “Dark Tourism and Legend Tripping”, the authors turn tour-guide and lead us to some intriguing and odd international locations; they contemplate why people may be drawn to visit places of grisly repute, to witness rituals alien to their own cultures or even to re-enact certain strange historical happenings. Included here are Aokighara – the notorious “suicide forest” of Japan, the Black Mausoleum of Edinburgh’s Greyfriars cemetery, with reported activity by the Mackenzie poltergeist, and the ghost tours of the Ararat Lunatic Asylum in Australia. Also covered are death rites and rituals such as the Torajan Ma’nene funerary customs in South Sulawesi, Indonesia, and the *Día de los Muertos* (Day of the Dead) celebrations in Mexico.

A surprising amount of lore is covered within this relatively slim but charming, attractively presented book, with illustrations by Kathryn Avent and Tiina Lilja. (An old adage dictates that you shouldn’t judge a book by its cover but I was beguiled by the frontage of this book as soon as I saw it.) Subjects are given a satisfying amount of considered attention rather than being skimmed over, but other examples are mentioned in passing, whetting the reader’s appetite for further research. The allocation of the five chapters works well, giving the book a tight focus while still covering a lot of ground and providing plenty of scope for possible further volumes in the series.

★★★★★

Waiting For You

A *Detectorists* Zine

ed. Cormac Pentecost

Temporal Boundary Press 2021/22

Pb, 54pp, £6.75

Quietly flourishing in a shady nook of BBC4 between 2014 and 2017, Mackenzie Crook’s sublime sitcom *Detectorists* followed the low-octane adventures of the Danebury Metal Detecting Club, a tiny huddle of hobbyists seeking buried treasure in the Essex countryside. Over three series, the show’s own complex strata of themes were slowly uncovered: the intertwining of love and obsession, the mindfulness of all-consuming pastimes, and the relationship between landscape, history and the lingering echoes of “what lies beneath”.

The first issue of this charming zine edited by Folk Horror enthusiast Cormac Pentecost concentrates on these latter aspects. David Colohan’s excellent “Phantom Signals: Voices From the Past in Detectorists” notes the influence of MR James in the show’s subtle dalliances with the uncanny.



For both Crook and James, the landscape is protective of its legacy and will punish those who disrespect its secrets. David Petts contributes a splendidly wry paper on the psychogeography of the fictional Danebury, and Rosemary Pardoe reviews a brace of earlier novels by Crook that reveal

a burgeoning interest in the otherworldliness of the English countryside.

In Issue Two Scott Lyall explores the mindfulness of hobbies – including his own passion for Bigfoot-related fortaean – while Innes M Keighren writes touchingly of the show as a comforting refuge from anxiety, a “golden summer” encapsulation of a modern-day Merrie England.

With a third edition on the way, *Waiting For You* is an appropriate tribute to *Detectorists*: filled with simple pleasures, gleeful diversions and the occasional fleeting spectre.

Bob Fischer

★★★★★





ALSO RECEIVED

WE LEAF THROUGH A SMALL SELECTION OF THE DOZENS OF BOOKS THAT HAVE ARRIVED AT FORTÉAN TOWERS IN RECENT MONTHS...

The Healing Practices of the Knights Templar and Hospitaller Plants, Charms, and Amulets of the Healers of the Crusades

Jon G Hughes

Destiny Books, 2022

Pb, £17.99, 416pp, ISBN 9781544113301

The Knights Templar do not readily come to mind when we think of healing organisations of the Middle Ages, but the bad press gained by the chivalric orders of Crusaders should not detract from the positive accomplishments of the Hospitallers. With this in mind, Hughes has studied how the latter spread Western European medical knowledge to the Levant and brought back Middle Eastern knowledge and techniques. Hughes has also studied the travels of Crusader physicians from the Mediterranean to the northern reaches of Europe and Russia, finding extant traces of 'old' medical practices among 'folk hearers'. Instead of downplaying the magical nature of some of them, Hughes interprets them as early insights into psychological and emotional conditions and treatments. Most impressive is his recovery of extensive knowledge from the herbals, medicinals and chemical tracts found on his – and their – journeys. The final third of the book is a summary of a Hospitaller 'leechbook' detailing remedies and talismans for everything from battle wounds to snakebites. Not for everyone, but focused studies like this are, nevertheless, priceless.

Cursed Britain A History of Witchcraft and Black Magic in Modern Times

Thomas Waters

Yale University Press, 2020

Pb, £12.99, 360pp, ISBN 9780300254778

Waters tackles the matter of why, in these modern times, witchcraft should still play a significant role in the life of citizens worldwide, especially in Britain over the last two centuries. For many, it influences their choice of healing, worship, and relationships as well as physical and

mental wellbeing. The bulk of this detailed survey examines the many different nationalities and ethnic groups that have made their home in Britain and examines the type and manifestations of witchcraft practices they brought with them. These beliefs – sometimes, but not always, centring around communal worship – also determined their food, medicine and other remedies, particularly relating to what Waters calls "supernatural healing and protection from supernatural harm". This category of witchcraft, he discovers, is not only prevalent but highly adaptable, and yet is also the most secret. Waters presents case studies from healers, the furious, the depressed, the rogues and victims; but also, in its extreme form, those (usually children) who have been accused of witchcraft only to suffer abusive exorcisms. There are many histories of witchcraft and magic, but this one is distinguished by its impressive scholarship, compelling narratives and good writing.

Hidden History Ancient Aliens and the Suppressed Origins of Civilization

Jim Willis

Visible Ink, 2020

Pb, £12.99, 440pp, ISBN: 9781578597109

This book's subtitle – "Ancient Aliens and the Suppressed Origins of Civilization" – summarises the main topics that connect most of Willis's previous books, each having a slightly different emphasis. This one's cover certainly bangs all the drums of paranoia and conspiracy theories, claiming that the reader will be left wondering "what evidence the powerful might be suppressing" as they "hide the true origins of modern civilization". This reviewer wondered why he should bother to read through it. Willis has seven major sections: theories of cosmic origins; the origins of life; the first humans; the founders of nations and teachers of civilisation; cultural progression through history; 'were we the first?'; and 'where are we

going?' Through it all, Willis posits the possibility of alien intervention and high-level collusion. It's a big book, packed with interesting material (some of it new) and well illustrated, but, as with many New Age Revisionist tomes, it cannot avoid the appearance of being highly selective in its relentless meander through deeply complex subjects. Its redeeming factor is that while rehashing much that we have heard before over the last few decades, it is a tighter, broader and more thoughtful overview than most.

666 And All That Apocalypse When?

Paul Whiteman

Mataador, 2021

Pb, £7.99, 82pp, ISBN 9781800461802

This curious, wittily titled little book records Whiteman's personal investigation into the notorious 'number of the Beast'. It began as a whim which immediately precipitated a "violent thunderstorm and severe asthma attack". Not one to be put off so easily, Whiteman launched himself into "the strange world of mystical numbers and apocalyptic messages", including a fresh analysis of St John's 'Revelation' and its implications for occultism. Well written and easy to follow, but of specialist interest.

Universe Within The Surprising Way the Human Brain Models the Universe

Melvin A Felton

IFF Books, 2022

Pb, £17.99, 307pp, ISBN 9781789047196

There has been a notable increase in books from physicists on the nature of the mind and the brain, from Roger Penrose's ideas about the relationship between quantum mechanics and what we call 'reality', to this: Felton's suggestion that the human brain has modelled its structure and dynamics upon the Universe "at large". This is an imaginative investigation, carefully explained, of how reality itself may emerge from some kind of interdependency

between our neural networks and fundamental forces at the quantum level. It is heady stuff, but there is a general feeling that we *may* be on the right track. The overview presented in studies like this go some way to help the rest of us (non-physicists) stay aware of the great thought-experiments going on, even if we can't understand the details.

The Deception of Gods and Men

Barry Fitzgerald & Brian Allan

Flying Disk Press, 2022

Pb, £11.99, 204pp, ISBN 9798451874899

This slender book sets out to confirm your worst suspicions about angels and demons; gods, prophets and messiahs; aliens and space messengers; fairies; mediums and spirits, and almost every other element of the New Age imagination. They are not what they seem or say they are, writes ghost-hunter Fitzgerald and Allan, a veteran researcher into UFOs, occult and paranormal phenomena. They race through a dense forest of subjects at full tilt, endlessly summarising unsubstantiated notions with very few references. Their message is that 'they' are actually a mirror of ourselves and that we all must 'wake up'. There is nothing here that we have not been told before. Sadly, this poorly proofed rant will appeal to few, even among those who already hold such views.

Paranormal Sunderland

Steve Watson

Amberley Publishing, 2022

Pb, £15.99, 96pp, ISBN 9781389110519

Sunderland, steeped in mediæval history, has its fair share of ghosts and hauntings of all types. From persistent wet footprints to the last remains of persecuted witches, Watson has gathered them from years of local trudging and following his curiosity. This a well-illustrated and well-told survey of 27 sites. As time dissolves such places, sacrifices to development and 'progress', FT is always glad to see that someone cares enough to put them on record.

Will she? Won't she?

A familiar set-up becomes a fresh and intriguing take on the psychological horror genre, featuring as it does strong female characters deftly handled by a female writer-director



She Will

Dir Charlotte Colbert, UK 2022
In cinemas from 22 July

Veronica Ghent (a brave and committed performance by Alice Krige) is a damaged former child movie star who after a double mastectomy takes herself off to a remote Scottish healing retreat to recuperate. Her only companion is her nurse, Desi (Kota Eberhardt). The retreat is run by a flamboyant, New Agey artist called Tirador (played with typical flourish by Rupert Everett) who encourages Veronica and the other guests to become more in tune with the forces of nature and let those forces flow through them. Veronica also learns that the retreat is located on the very site at which many women were burned as witches in the 18th century.

So far, so folk horror. Actually, though, the film is less concerned with lore and myth than it is with issues of identity: specifically, how Veronica now perceives herself following surgery that has made her question to what extent she is still a woman, particularly when dealing with the beautiful and vibrant young Desi. Veronica also finds herself recalling an early-life trauma, and how that defined her as a child and later as a woman.

We hear a lot of talk about how

horror has an increasing number of 'strong female characters', but in practice this generally means a young woman in a dirty vest hacking away with a machete at mutant rednecks. This film has none of that. True, there is an element in it which could (very) loosely be described as 'rape and revenge', but that would be to misrepresent the film as a whole. In short, the film is not about what women do so much as it is about who women are.

It's not perfect, of course; few films are. It falls into the trap of reusing a lot of familiar horror imagery and there are too many closeups of snails and slugs as sledgehammer reminders that we are beyond the human here-and-now and dealing instead with pure nature. There are also lots of, admittedly achingly beautiful, drone shots of the Scottish Highlands and trees and lakes. It's labouring the point in a way that David Lean was often criticised for: gorgeous landscape shots which were inessential to the story and made the film feel like a coffee table book.

For cinephiles, though, there's a lot to enjoy. Horror fans will remember Alice Krige from *Sleepwalkers* and, further back, the underrated adaptation of Peter Straub's *Ghost Story*. All film fans will be pleased to see Malcolm McDowell, who manages

to wring a lot out of a small but crucial part. Speaking of whom, there is a scene in which his character is interviewed on a talk show by Podrick Lochran, who is played by Jonathan Aris, son of the late actor Ben Aris, who played opposite McDowell in several films in the 1960s and 1970s, most notably Lindsay Anderson's *if...* and *O Lucky Man!* The soundtrack, by Clint Mansell, is excellent.

Daniel King



On the Trail of Bigfoot: The Discovery

Dir Seth Breedlove, USA 2021
Studiocanal, £14.99 (Blu-ray)

From the documentary company Small Town Monsters comes the initial instalment of a new series of films on Bigfoot, *On the Trail of Bigfoot: The Discovery*. The "discovery" of the film's title is an alleged Bigfoot "nest site" located in the Olympic Peninsula region of Washington State, which consists of numerous large nests made up of carefully woven sticks and underbrush. A logger, exploring a remote area of dense, old, unlogged forest, discovered the site in 2016 and brought it to the attention of Olympic Project, an amateur Sasquatch research group. The remote location of the nest site, to the researchers' minds – and in the opinion of several professional scientists they enlisted to assist with the study – appears to rule out human origin, while the size and intricacy of the woven beds suggest a need for opposable thumbs and some degree of intelligence: all this would seem to indicate the presence of large, semi-intelligent, human-like creatures, i.e., Bigfoot. And yet, this would not be the first occurrence of a large-scale

project of great intricacy (crop circles) or intentional remoteness (the recent spate of monoliths). Indeed, the nest sites may in fact be that age-old bugbear of anomalous research: a well-planned hoax.

For the most part, this documentary maintains a refreshingly level-headed, sober-minded, dispassionate tone. Director and narrator Seth Breedlove, who also appears on-screen as interviewer, is to be commended for his avoidance of the pratfalls of the many sensationalist Bigfoot documentaries and television shows that litter the digital landscape like so much Sasquatch scat. As is to be expected, the camera work and editing is solidly professional, and there is an abundance of drone footage of the extremely breathtaking wilderness of the Olympic Peninsula. However, the nest site discovery at the centre of this documentary never adequately achieves the level of the Earth-shattering discovery that the filmmakers want it to be. Instead, what viewers are left with is largely what is to be expected from any Bigfoot documentary, whatever its pedigree: science-based ruminations on the potential existence of a community of large ape-like creatures in the dense wilderness of the western United States, and firsthand eyewitness accounts coupled with amateur researchers backpacking and camping with green night-vision cameras, all of them hopelessly chasing after a creature that becomes less tangible with each additional piece of physical evidence poured into its almost invisible trace – a legend that only creeps further into darkness the more we attempt to coax it out into the light.

Eric Hoffmann





TELEVISION

FT's very own couch potato, STU NEVILLE, casts an eye over the small screen's current fortaean offerings



"Alcatraz" reads the *X-Files*-typeface title of another episode of *Mystery Quest* (Blaze). Cue monochrome shots of peaked-capped guards wandering corridors to the echoes of shrieking from the solitarily confined. This barren island in San Francisco Bay, we're told (somewhat superfluously), "was not a destination designed to inspire joy in its inmates", with the almost inevitable addition that "hundreds of years ago, Native American tradition held that it was inhabited by evil spirits." They always are. Over to Susan Sloate, author of *The Secrets of Alcatraz*, her face lit from below like a child up late holding a torch to its chin in order to tell a ghost story. She

says reports started to emerge soon after the opening of the dreaded solitary confinement area and the subsequent suicides there: shrieks, groans and, intriguingly, the sound of Al Capone playing the banjo.

"We're going to Alcatraz" we're informed, which is probably for the best if we're going to see the Paranormal Team, led by the doughty Tom Netzbant, investigating the hauntings with the usual tried and tested methods: trying

"Native American tradition held it was inhabited by evil spirits"

to record sound, wandering around in low light pointing electronics at things and saying, "I just heard a voice!" Meanwhile, the Expedition Team are asking whether the three famous fugitives, as portrayed by Clint Eastwood and co., really did manage to *Escape From Alcatraz*, the route they must have taken, whether or not they'd survive, and what they would look like today (hint: older versions of themselves). Over to Frank Erne, skip tracer – "he finds people who don't want to be found" – strolling up and down a nearby beach, who tells us that the escapees would have headed for land. He knows what he's doing.

"June 11, 1962," says the voiceover, as they follow Morris and the Anglin brothers' trajectory through the Gormenghast architecture and out onto the rocks. But where did they go from there? Flicking between the two scenarios – the paranormal

and the escape – means there's an awful lot of recap involved.

Back to the Paranormal Team and their equipment – the Ovilus (which looks like the late 1970s toy 'Merlin') and the Paranormal Puck, both of which apparently convert paranormal activity into speech – as they process along the dingy corridor calling out to departed inmates. ("Hey Al Capone! I hear you play a mean banjo!"). They nab some EVP and later a chap in a tie looks at a laptop and says it's not a sound that a human being could possibly make. We expect nothing less.

Back to the beach. Erne says that last year there was a report of a mysterious boat in the area on the night of the escape, and that this may be connected; he believes they got away, possibly to Brazil. The credits start running over the voiceover "Our teams have turned up important data!" Maybe, but no plucking Capone.

THE REVEREND'S REVIEW

FT's resident man of the cloth REVEREND PETER LAWS dons his dog collar and faces the flicks that Church forgot!

From the duelling skeletons of Ray Harryhausen to the cheese perversions of Wallace and Gromit, stop motion effects always creep me out. Now, effects legend Phil Tippett has made the most nightmarish stop motion film known to science. *Mad God* (streaming on Shudder) sees a lone figure descend into a disturbing abyss of cruel machines, sickening creatures, and graphic violence. It's a savage work of dystopian art and shows that, even at 70, Tippett has lost none of his art school rage.

You might say the same for heavy metal art collective Gwar, still on the road after 30 years of excess, famous for their massive demon outfits, which spurt bodily fluids onto their rabid fans at gigs. You'll

catch every drop in a new documentary, *This is Gwar!* (streaming on Shudder) It's a disgusting and hilarious riot. Surprisingly moving, too. Gwar were close to fame and fortune, but never quite made it; but the stories they tell are legendary.

Moloch (streaming on Shudder) sounds like a member of Gwar. It's actually a Dutch folk horror about a peat bog "unleashing ancient evil". Don't they all? The story plods a bit and it's hardly ground-breaking, but there's a spooky ending and a pleasingly gloomy vibe that might just get under your skin.

If you'd rather get your skin completely sliced off, then try the UHD release of *Tenebrae* (Arrow Video, £34.99), one of Dario Argento's best. An American crime author tours

Massive demon outfits spurt bodily fluids onto their rabid fans at gigs

Rome – but have his tales inspired a real, whispering serial killer? It's a wonderfully deranged film, with a first-rate score and fabulous set pieces; not least the one in which Veronica Lario (future wife of Italian PM Silvio Berlusconi) has her arm chopped off in one of the most audacious gore scenes ever. So much 4K blood.

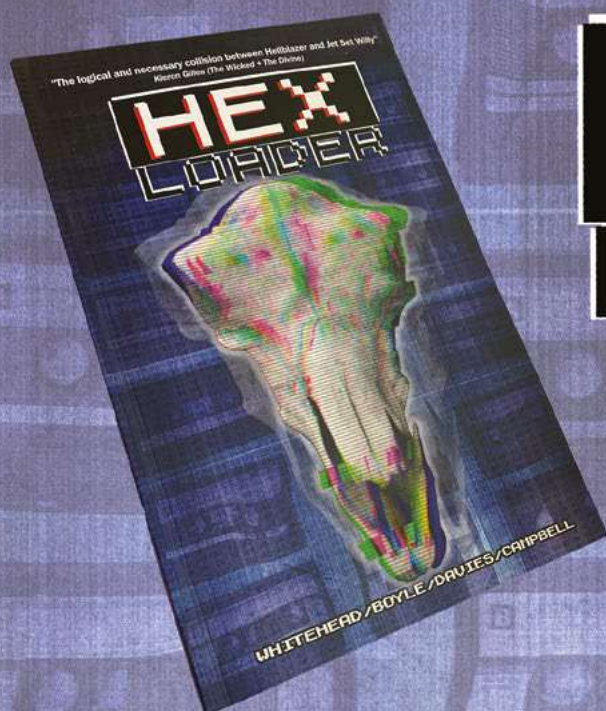
Looking even more pristine is the UHD release of *The VVitch* (Second Sight, £49.99), about a banished Puritan family living by a witch-infested wood. Robert Eggers offers a scary and elegant reminder that spirituality is supposed to enhance, not suppress, your life.

Hell High (Arrow Video,

£17.99) is a slasher movie about how teachers should deal with stress. If your class bullies you: kill 'em. The genre was out of steam by 1989, so the film sank on release, and reviews called it a "routine slasher-thriller". It's not. It lacks the slasher focus on kill count and violence, but the positives are considerable: an effective story, believable characters, and decent performances.

Room for one more? How about *Moonfall* (Lionsgate, £24.99), where an unstable Moon triggers catastrophe. The US want to nuke the thing but a "nerdy science guy who loves his mum" says the Moon is a giant alien machine. Director Roland Emmerich has made plenty of mindlessly fun disaster films in the past, but this one of the worst films I've ever seen. The pacing is bizarre, the most mundane locations green screened and the characters unlikeable. Put it this way, I wanted the Moon to kill everybody... even me.

"The logical and necessary collision between Hellblazer and Jet Set Willy"
Kieron Gillen (The Wicked + The Divine)



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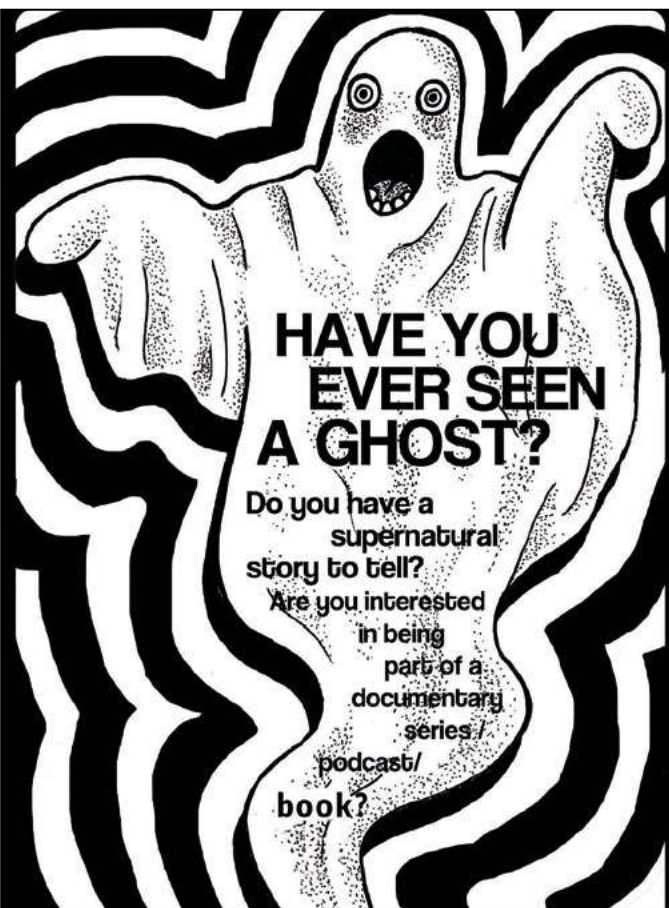
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Fairies Of Eathie Burn

Simon Young's account of the Wollaton Gnomes [FT417:29] brought to mind an account of "The Fairies of The Burn of Eathie" – a footnote in Hugh Miller's book *The Old Red Sandstone* (1841). The book itself is a geological exploration of parts of Scotland and the fossils found therein. It is fascinating in that it was written before Darwin's *On The Origin of Species* was published and long before knowledge of tectonic plates and mass extinctions caused by asteroid strikes. In fact, Hugh Miller died just one year before Darwin published the book that totally changed the way we view fossils.

In Miller's book there is a remarkable description of the fairies of the Burn of Eathie. "On a sabbath morning all residents of a hamlet had gone to church except a herd-boy and his sister. They saw a long cavalcade ascending out the ravine through the wooded hollow... The horses were shaggy, diminutive things, speckled dun and grey; the riders, stunted, misgrown, ugly creatures, attired in antique jerkins of plaid, long grey cloaks, and little red caps, from under which their wild uncombed locks shot out over their cheeks and foreheads... the last rider, who lingered a few yards behind the others... 'What are ye, little mannie? And where are ye going?' inquired the boy... 'Not of the race of Adam,' said the creature, turning for a moment in his saddle: 'The People of Peace shall never more be seen in Scotland.'"

Dr Peter WH Smith

Watton at Stone, Hertfordshire

Glass delusion

There have been many incidents of previously perfectly sane adults all of a sudden believing that they have parts of their bodies that are made of glass. This glass delusion was quite prevalent in the Middle Ages and has been documented accordingly. Cervantes, Descartes and Locke all refer to it. One famous early sufferer

SIMULAGRA CORNER

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them (with your postal address) to Fortean Times, PO Box 1200, Whitstable CT1 9RH or to sieveking@forteantimes.com.



Kevin Mackenzie writes: "Despite living in our current home in County Durham for over 16 years, it took a friend to point out that he's always been aware of the Grim Reaper watching over us."

was King Charles VI of France, who refused to allow people to touch him and wore reinforced clothing to protect himself from accidental 'shattering'.

This bizarre phenomenon has been encountered in more recent times, as during the 1967 Six Day War between Israel and the Arab states, the commander of the Egyptian air force could not stand up or even get out of bed, as he believed in all seriousness that his legs were made of glass and would break if he stood on them.

Was the fact that the entire air force was wiped out by a surprise Israeli attack and the resultant shock and stress that the man obviously suffered, not to mention fearing the potential wrath of the authorities in Cairo

in reaction, responsible for this episode? Can readers with a medical background enlighten us?

Phil Brand

London

The boggle factor

I'd like to applaud Simon Young for his brave piece admitting that much forteana he doesn't believe in is based not on rational enquiry but on feeling and preference and instinct [FT419:25]. Over the years I have been guilty, in arguments with strangers and acquaintances, of presenting some of my own beliefs for and against a thing as founded on rational evidence, when really I am far more likely to be going with my gut. This isn't to say I don't examine the evidence, or try to find a

way to construct a coherent and solid support for an opinion; and there's only so far I'll walk round somebody else's data, tutting and looking for a loophole, before I admit its solidity. But I'm not a reasoning machine, and my opinions are born from instinct, not reason.

I have always considered instinct a reliable tool, made up as it is of accrued experience, and it's so much quicker than reason, and handier in life generally. By its nature, much forteana floats outside the dense evidence field our ordinary lives inhabit, and perhaps neither reason nor instinct, or a combination of the two, are good guides, but it would be nice if we could all drop the pretence we're Sherlock Holmes. I doubt very much a real Sherlock, building everything on solid data, could survive or navigate an ordinary life.

I would be very glad to see the back of people underestimating the humanity of others by rolling out pop psychology explanations for their beliefs. I find myself on the opposite side of Mr Young on almost every count he listed, but I don't think I have any hope of understanding his emotional reasons for disbelief simply by reading his column, any more than he could understand my emotional reasons for belief by reading this letter.

What matters in a discussion is that a person is open to examination of the possibilities, and that they recognise the roots of their own opinions, and when they are being honest and fair with themselves and others. I think it's particularly important to recognise that a person can, having been just as scrupulous about evidence as oneself, hold an opposing opinion.

Dean Teasdale

Gateshead, Tyne & Wear

Human frailty

In my letter [FT417:68] about John Chordman's earlier letter [FT413:70] I was trying to bring some balance to his argument, so the direction taken in his response [FT419:68] surprised me. I agree with him that a scientific

LETTERS

background doesn't provide immunity against the sort of human frailties he refers to. I am well aware of the dangers of cognitive dissonance, personal bias, selective enquiry etc and try to guard against them. I was thinking of the uncertainties arising from the way we use/perceive statistical data and ambiguous evidence; these can leave believers and sceptics alike dissatisfied.

I am unsure whether to be insulted or flattered by Mr Chordman's comparison of my views on astrology and graphology with Richard Dawkins's criticism of scientists who are religious, but I am sure that it misses the point. Astrologers and graphologists make predictions that can be – and have been – tested and shown to be wanting. By comparison, religious faith is not open to testing in the same way.

I am also unsure what he means by "clearly 'the level of evidence on offer' will vary from one individual to another" – if the evidence is there, it is open to anyone who looks for it. Of course, the quality of the evidence considered sufficient to support or deny a given position will vary between individuals. I probably cast a more critical eye over evidence than many might, but I think that others such as lawyers and historians would do the same.

Ron Gardner

Upton Snodsbury, Worcestershire

Ghost analysis

Alan Murdie seems unacquainted with my analysis of the Hampton Court fire door ghost video [FT419:61]. See: www.xenophon.org.uk/firedoorghost.html. Perhaps he is also unacquainted with my analysis of the Brown Lady of Raynham Hall photograph. See: www.xenophon.org.uk/raynham.html

Roger J Morgan

London

Nuclear Mutant Seals

Diane Brandon's letter [FT416:72] about impending nuclear mutations, and the importing of nuclear waste from "China, America

DEVIL'S DOOR



Here's an example of a Devil's Door from the north side of St Mary's Church in Old Amersham, Buckinghamshire [see FT414:48-51, 417:68].

Richard Carey, Pinner, Middlesex

and elsewhere" via Grimsby, are the sort of claims that does the non-nuclear cause no favours. Perhaps she was stirred up by the local press, such as the emotive *Grimsby Telegraph* headline "Nuclear waste from all over UK could be dumped on Lincolnshire coast" – the term 'dumped' implying that it's just going to be tipped on to the beaches.

The vast majority of the UK's waste comes from our own nuclear power stations (the UK relies on nuclear energy for 17 per cent of our electricity generation), and some hospital and military waste. Between 70% and 75% of the UK's high-activity radioactive waste is currently stored above ground at the Sellafield site in north-west England, one of 20 storage sites around the UK, but surface storage is not a viable long-term solution beyond much more than 100 years, so a better solution has to be found. The three proposed sites for

geological disposal facilities (GDFs) – at Hartlepool (Co. Durham), Theddlethorpe (in Lincolnshire), or Cumbria – are intended to deal with the UK's long-running problem of storing our own legacy nuclear waste materials, accumulated from the 1950s onwards, by providing a safe deposit site for approximately 750,000 cubic metres of high-activity waste, hundreds of metres underground, in areas thought to have suitable geology to securely isolate the radioactive material for hundreds or thousands of years.

The waste would be solidified, safely packaged, and placed into deep subterranean vaults, which would then be backfilled and the surrounding network of tunnels and chambers sealed. Finland is doing exactly the same thing at Olkiluoto. Under international law, each country is responsible for its own nuclear waste storage (meaning it can't be

exported or transported internationally), so we have to store it somewhere.

While we can all sympathise with the desire of every proposed site to not be the one chosen, one has to be selected sooner or later, because the problem won't go away. There are also some benefits in the form of 500 very well-paid jobs, and the inward investment they represent.

Whatever the final outcomes of discussions at all the various proposed sites, there is no possibility of the claimed nuclear imports from China, America or elsewhere, as that would breach international treaties on nuclear waste movement and management, and no such imports have taken place.

And mutated seals are unlikely. Apart from the fact that the storage will be in radiation-proof containers deep underground, the Chernobyl forest has shown that animals appear not to be as easily mutated as was popularly thought likely in the 1950s. Plants yes, but survival of the fittest means that animals too deformed die early and only healthy ones survive into adulthood, so the animals seen in around Chernobyl are all normal-looking; in fact, animal populations have thrived [see FT324:6].

Andy Kelly

By email

Holy Russia

Having read Gary Lachman's excellent book *The Return of Holy Russia*, his article [FT418:36-41] – essentially a very swift summary of his book – was of great interest. What comes over better from the historical content of the book is that the war in Ukraine is going to be a long war – not because the Western nations are intent on prolonging it, but because recovering Ukraine (and eventually Kyiv) is deep in Putin's psyche.

Notwithstanding the Western Alliance painting Russia as the 'evil villain', the way Putin sees it from a historical perspective is that Russia may pose the last chance for humanity in the ongoing spiritual war on Earth.

The idea involves the concept of an Armageddon-style final and decisive clash between two different superpower cultures, the Atlanticist West, which is determined to turn the world into a borderless, controlled marketplace, and the spiritual civilisation and 'traditional values' of Eurasia, resolved to resist the commercialisation of Earth. While this view may sound bizarre to Western minds, Putin appears to believe in this mission for Russia, based on the many speeches that he has given referencing this in recent years. This is why the war in Ukraine has many levels to it.

Indeed, Putin has even gone so far as to make the written works of certain Russian philosophers – namely Nikolai Berdyaev, Vladimir Solovyov and Ivan Ilyin – required reading for his regional governors, and in particular, Ivan Ilyin's *On Resisting Evil with Force*. Putin has described Ilyin as a profound influence on him. This idea of Russia having a special place in the future of the planet is echoed by important Russian authors such as Fyodor Dostoyevsky, who refers to it as the "coming Russia".

This "coming time" relates to Russia's deep connection to Christianity, fundamental to Putin's vision, which includes the linking of East and West in what has been termed "the Third Way". In *The Russian Idea* (also on Putin's "required reading list"), Berdyaev remarks that "the Russian has a greater capacity for enduring suffering than the man of the West". In other words, suffering to achieve the end goal is not a problem for Russians, as they are used to it, unlike the pampered Western population.

The origins of the "Russians" are inextricably linked to Kyiv, and hark back to the days when Scandinavian elite warriors called the Rus' took control of Kyiv in the ninth century. For Putin, this historical link is important. With the help of Orthodox Christianity a thousand or more years ago, Russia rose to become

a unified nation, and the Kievan Rus' legends are firmly planted in the Russian psyche.

For Putin, Kyiv is the geopolitical heart of the Russian state, the "mother of Russian cities". His ultimate aim is to regain Kyiv, the land of the original Rus', echoing the aim of Ivan The Terrible at the start of the 16th century. Putin has even commissioned a statue of Prince Vladimir of Kyiv, which stands outside the Kremlin, confirming the view he holds along with his favourite philosopher, Ivan Ilyin, that Ukraine is unquestionably part of Russia. Orthodox Christianity, and its beginnings in Russian Kyiv when Prince

Vladimir converted to Orthodox Christianity from paganism in 989, is important to Putin, and in May 2016, he made a pilgrimage to Mount Athos, the birthplace of Orthodox Christianity.

The "end times" are never far from

Putin's thoughts it seems, and at the same time as Patriarch Kirill, bishop of Moscow, was warning in November 2017 that "one must be blind not to see the approach of the terrible moment of history about which the Apostle and Evangelist John the Theologian spoke in his Revelation", Putin chose to conduct nuclear exercises.

Putin's focus on the end times would likely have been influenced by Solovyov, who wrote in *War, Progress and the End of History* (another book in Putin's list of required reading) that a great war between East and West would take place before long. This would bring about Solovyov and Putin's "Third Way" for Russia, where Solovyov predicted that a "figure would cast a glittering veil of good and truth over the mystery of utter lawlessness which would characterise the end times". Putin believes this "figure" is Putin himself.

Ultimately, Putin follows the philosophical direction of Nikolay Fedorov and Lenin, which centres on the West's misguided ideas about freedom.



The problem with the West is the belief in the "me", not the "we". This Putin considers to be the root of all evil. Consequently, Putin's actions are not about the "individual", but the "whole". The individual doesn't matter. Unity was central to Ilyin's political and social views. For him, individuals on their own are nothing: they can only be "free" within the embrace of community.

This is why the West has underestimated the force of Putin, which is not simply about power and control, but has an ideological basis. The current war in Ukraine may therefore be a long and bitter struggle ahead for all.

Piers Morris

By email

The White Boys

My good friend and fellow Weird Weekend North presenter Steve Jones was a member of a group, including cryptozoologist Richard Freeman, that ventured over to the Isle of Man in early May to look for Gef the Talking Mongoose. Unfortunately, he couldn't be found. While in Douglas they visited The Manx Museum where, in the folklore section, Steve noticed a small paragraph about 'The White Boys', accompanied by a costume and a black and white photo. It briefly said that they used to visit people's houses to beg for money. Interestingly, the costume consisted of a white robe with some coloured ribbons attached and a round, white headpiece with eyeholes in it. Given the close connection between Liverpool and the Isle of Man, Steve naturally asked if there might be a link with the Aintree Spectres [FT399:38-42], whom I describe as wearing KKK-type attire and marching around a field close to the village brandishing burning torches. After all, local author Tom Slemen has written

about 'The Lily White Boys', who could be potential candidates.

I followed this up by checking various relevant websites, but disappointingly it does not look as if 'The White Boys' are involved. They are in fact a group of mummers who deliver a traditional play very similar to the Warburton Souling Plays [FT359:76-77], but instead of taking place in early November it is delivered at Christmastime: see www.mastermummers.org/articles/Miller-2011.htm; [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_White_Boys_\(mummers\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_White_Boys_(mummers)). Videos of the play are available online at <https://vimeo.com/387487768>. They show that although some players are dressed in white, this is not the case for all of them. So, although there are several teasing similarities to the clothing and behaviour of the Aintree Spectres, the differences are all too apparent. But it was definitely a good lead and Steve hadn't sent me on a wild (mon) goose chase!

Rob Gandy

By email

'Owning' celebrities

SD Tucker's note on neighbouring countries arguing about the 'ownership' of historical celebrities (Macedonia and Greece for Alexander the Great; Russia and Ukraine for St Vladimir; FT418:50) reminded me of Nikola Tesla, claimed by the Serbs on account of his ethnicity, but by the Croats owing to his place of birth, then in the Austrian Empire.

Marinus van der Sluijs

Vancouver, Canada



"Sure, twenty years ago, you didn't see anyone working in space travel who wasn't a little green man"

It Happened to Me...

Copyright puzzle

A couple of years ago I wrote a biography (still unpublished) of author William 'Billy' Holt (1897-1977; pictured at right), who was born in forteen hot-spot Todmorden. I found some letters written to Holt by local novelist Phyllis Bentley, and a few pages about Holt in a book called *Millstone Grit* by local author Glyn Hughes. I wanted to use direct quotations from both, so I needed to get permission from the copyright owners of these two deceased authors.

In hindsight, I should have just contacted the publishers of their books for permission, but as I happened to be in the reference/archives section of Calderdale Central Library in Halifax, where I do much of my research, I asked the Head Librarian if there was some way of tracing copyright owners. I was pleased and surprised when she told me of a website of a university (somewhere in middle England, I seem to remember, Hertfordshire or Herefordshire, perhaps) where you could do a copyright research.

So I visited the website, did two searches, and discovered that the copyrights of Bentley's writings were handled by solicitors in London, and that Hughes's copyright was handled by his widow Mrs Elizabeth Hughes, who lived not far from me. The names, addresses and email addresses were given of both.

I can't remember if I contacted the solicitors, but I definitely contacted Mrs Hughes as I recall emailing her for permission at around 3am (I sit up late sometimes, doing my writing) and was surprised to receive a reply and permission from her about 20 minutes later!

Sometime later, I came across an untitled poem by poet laureate Ted Hughes, which he dedicated to "The Spirit of Billy Holt", and I knew I would have to find the copyright owners of his work to seek their permission to reproduce the poem in the book.



"But if the website doesn't exist, then where did I get the names?"

I had forgotten the university website address, so I visited the library again and asked the Head Librarian to remind me of the university website I had previously used for copyright searches – but she gave me a blank look. There was no university website for copyright searches, she told me. I insisted she had told me about it and she looked puzzled. Just in case it had slipped her mind, she asked two other librarians who were present at the time, and they also offered me blank looks.

Eventually, she suggested I contact Ted Hughes's publishers to find the name and ad-

dress of the copyright owners of the poem, (which is what I should have done in the first place), but none of them knew of any university website that offered these searches.

I have a vivid memory being told the website address, scribbling it down, visiting the site, and discovering the names and contact details of Mrs Hughes and the London solicitors.

But if the website doesn't exist, then where did I get the names and contact details from? Either, the website *does* exist, (bearing in mind that three highly qualified and experienced librarians don't know about it or else have collectively forgotten about it), or else it was a false memory, or even (dare I say it?) an alternate reality. I remain bamboozled by the whole thing.

Andy Owens
Halifax, West Yorkshire

Gold returned

Two weeks ago [8 Jan 2022] I started reading *Just One of Those Things* (JOTT) by Mary Rose Barrington, which deals with objects that disappear from places just seen or seemingly relocate, to the bafflement of their owners, despite numerous searches of the high and low variety. I had mislaid some small gold bars after a house move 18 months ago and had searched everywhere for them to no avail. After starting Barrington's book, however, I felt inspired to try the old trick of 'asking' for my lost gold back. I made a little request out loud, saying how grateful I would be to find it again and clasped my hands together, prayer style, in thanks.

The next morning I was upstairs when, deciding to move a small table next to my reading chair, I spotted a bag underneath I had not seen for ages. It contained a folder with all my original documents, degree and marriage certificates etc. Immediately I knew what was happening and, lo and behold, beneath the folder lay my missing gold. I sat there for a moment in sheer disbelief yet with a wonderful feeling that somehow magic had just happened.

While not a classic case where I had looked in the same spot time and again before the object reappeared there, as dealt with in Barrington's book, it was still remarkable that I had made my request to the trickster just the previous day. Even better, instead of the two bars I had expected, there were three. So maybe I received a little gift on top for my troubles!

Duncan Kaiser
Pfeffingen, Switzerland

Phantom boiling

My partner has worked for London Underground for many years. Many readers may recollect the tragic train crash in Moorgate station in 1975 where 43 people died. The following

bizarre event occurred there in the late 1980s.

Several tube lines intersect at Moorgate and this happened in the staff mess room of the Metropolitan line. The Tube used to have 'in house' firemen, and this room used to be used by them. By the 1980s firemen were long gone and this was a general staff mess room consisting of two rooms. One was a larger room with a sofa, some easy chairs and a coffee table; attached to this was a small kitchen. There was only one door into the mess room and to access the kitchen you had to walk through the mess room first (as the kitchen had no separate entrance).

On one particular night shift there were only two staff on duty, so they had separate break times: one stayed in the control room while the other took a break. The chap having the break decided to try and take a nap, so turned the mess room lights off and lay down on the sofa. Just as he was dozing he heard the mess room door open and footsteps walk past him in the dark into the kitchen beyond. He heard the kettle switch on and start to heat up. He shouted out into the kitchen (to his colleague, he presumed) that he was awake and that he could turn the lights on if he needed to. There was no reply and no lights came on, so he got up and turned the mess room light on, and then walked into the dark kitchen expecting to see his colleague – but the room was empty.

No one had been heard coming back out of the kitchen, plus anyone coming out would have had to have passed the chap having his break, as there was only one door in and out. The chap having the break might have thought he'd dreamed the footsteps and door opening, except for the fact that *the kettle was boiling*. The kitchen was dark, but when the light was turned on, the room was full of steam. The poor guy was terrified and ran back to the control room where his bemused colleague said he'd not left his post nor come anywhere near the



“When the light was turned on, the kitchen was full of steam”

mess room and kitchen; however, he did recall an old story about the station being haunted by a dead fireman.

These rooms no longer exist in this form, as alterations have been made since then. I wonder what the poor ghost does now if he wants a cuppa...

Cathy Peake
London

Trousers of death

Two years ago, I was Depot Manager of a Transport Company based in Hawkhurst in Kent. One December evening at 6pm I was alone on site. All the trucks were parked up in the yard, and drivers and office staff had all gone home. I was just about to lock up, but there had been an accident outside the depot on the main road. Traffic was backed up, but I hadn't seen the accident itself. I had just finished a phone call and saw someone walk past

my window, which faced across the yard. As it was dark I only saw his trousers, which had two fluorescent white stripes round the bottoms of each leg. I wondered what he was doing walking into the yard and thought perhaps he was from one of the stationary cars stuck outside. I picked up a torch to go and find him so I could move him out, lock up, and go home. As I stepped out the office, I was lit up by the security lights coming on as they picked up my movement. It then occurred to me that they hadn't come on when the person walked across the yard. Anyway, I searched the yard and couldn't find anyone, which was strange as there was only the one entrance, and a high security fence bordering the yard. As I locked up and drove off, I passed a poor man on a stretcher in the road. He had the same fluorescent trousers on, with the white stripes, as the person who had walked into the yard without setting the lights off. I found out the next day the casualty was a motorcyclist who had died immediately.

Graham (surname on file)
Worthing, Sussex

In Issue 418:67, our IHTM section suffered a design error that resulted in part of one letter becoming hard to read. We reprint it here.

Nocturnal guides

I only recalled the following incident after 28 years as a result of a dream and a chance conversation with my mother. In July 1992, when I was 15, my mother, elder brother and I went on a family holiday in Cyprus. Our flight had been delayed and we arrived at night. My uncle had posted us directions from the airport to his villa in a fairly remote village in southern Cyprus. As I sat in the back looking up out the rear window of our hire car admiring the starry sky, my mother and brother realised they had taken a wrong turning somewhere in the dark and were now lost. We had been driving about 45 minutes and it was now about 2am.

I began to pray, something which I usually only did in church. Presently I saw headlights approaching, the first vehicle we had seen since leaving the airport. I demanded we stop, jumped out the car and, standing in the middle of the dirt track, flagged the car down. I approached and saw what I thought was an interior light and spoke to the two front seat occupants. I merely said "Maroni", the village we could not locate. I can't recall a voice answering but I felt that they understood and that we were to follow them. After about 20 minutes my mother said she started to remember the village we had entered from the time we had visited eight years earlier. The car we were following stopped ahead. My mother flashed her lights and the other car drove away without asking us if we had found where we were going. What absolutely amazed us was that the car had stopped right outside my uncle's villa, which was not well signposted or lit. Much to our relief, the local mayor who was a neighbour was still awake, had come down to see what was happening, and showed us where to park. I can't recall ever seeing faces in the mystery vehicle, just a feeling of absolute calm and trust.

Andy (surname on file)
Stourbridge, West Midlands



Peccaries that paint

Both Leonora Carrington and Edward James, with their Mexican and mammalian interests (FT419:51+68) might have been inspired by the

“peccary Picassos” (that’s right, peccaries that paint!) at Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum. You can see these artistic artiodactyls on Facebook.

Richard George
St Albans, Hertfordshire

UAPs

I agree with Jenny Randles [FT417:31] that it is progress of sorts that the term UAP is now having a higher profile than the former acronym UFO. She is quite correct to remind us that the divide between “what science does and what ufology proclaims is often a gulf too wide”. And she is probably right in saying “giving up on legitimate UFO science has left it to the conspiracy theorists”.

The point is there was no real ‘UFO science’ to begin with, so the unusual aerial phenomena that were perceived that encouraged writers to take an interest in UFOs had to start from their own understanding of what they were trying to explain. The term ‘UFO’ was useful, but it did imply that the ‘objects’ that were actually seen as ‘flying’ were spacecraft of sorts, and if they were not of human origin (which was soon perceived as unlikely), then they must come from outside Earth’s atmosphere. They must be, therefore, piloted by ‘aliens’. Others, like Trevor Constable, said they were not solid objects at all, but some sort of biological organism that was indeed living in our atmosphere. Others went further

and said that UFOs were some kind of occultic phenomena.

From my knowledge of UFO investigations and UFO books, there never seemed to be a primary hypothesis about the nature and origin of UFOs. It matters little that researchers once said: “I became interested in UFOs at the age of 15...” What is of significance is that most of them employed their own version of the scientific method. Some simply collected verbatim data and commentary on what they thought was an insufficiently probed phenomenon – like Timothy Good and Leslie Kean, who spent much of their lives travelling the world and interviewing intelligence and military officials to get their take the UFO issue. In a sense they became UFO scholars.

As a science writer I first made references to UFOs not through any preconceived theory about them but because I wanted to research the subject of space debris that had gained some press interest in the 1990s, and which would have been a suitable continuation of some earlier work of mine on meteorites.

Two things struck me; firstly, ‘space debris’ was not merely the flecks of paint and bits of dirt from the panels of stratospheric satellites, but such debris also fell to Earth in larger chunks of broken-up satellites. In doing so it would often flare and become illuminated, and startled witnesses would refer to the ‘UFOs’ they had seen. Secondly, civilian pilots would also refer to odd-shaped objects seeming to be able to fly parallel with them, which I assumed was also space debris flying at bizarre angles.

In a later book I took the subject further by writing about *Fireballs, Skyquakes and Hums* (2011), and mentioned in the flyleaf that I covered “a wide range of natural objects and unexplained phenomena that can be seen so often in our skies”, and that this would include comets, ball lightning, anti-matter explosions, disc-like clouds and such like.

However, the final three chapters necessarily, it seemed to me, had to deal speculatively with UFOs – using the same word – because it had been brought up in the earlier part of the book.

So the die was cast; I have become a UFO writer, and have

written other UFO books. But in doing so I have been true to the profession of science writing. Like Jenny Randles I know that UAPs are real and should be investigated and written about with as much accuracy and objectivity as possible. I hope too that “the divide between what science does and what ufology proclaims” has been narrowed.

Antony Milne
London

Neet boggarts

I enjoyed the features on boggarts in FT416. I’m not sure how I missed Simon Young’s Census. However, having been born in 1955 in Preston, Lancashire, and brought up five miles further south in Leyland, I long associated boggarts with bridges – I don’t know how I got this idea, but maybe because of this I always thought of the wolf under the bridge in the folk tale “The Three Billy Goats Gruff” as some kind of boggart.

I always associated my family background solely with Preston until sometime in the 1990s. My father (born in Preston in 1924) told me that his father (born 1902) had told him that we Darwens (pronounced “Darren” by older people in Preston back in the 1960s and 1970s, to my knowledge) are “neet boggarts from t’ Brig” – a neet boggart being a kind of ghost – that is, a boggart that comes out at night, and from Bamber Bridge (or t’ Brig), a few miles south of where the family lived on Preston’s New Hall Lane. The inference was that we were “dirty stop outs” – my translation, which my older sister agrees with, though while I felt there was some suggestion of getting up to mischief, my sister says she felt it meant that they had a good time while they were out, most likely at the pub. She heard him say it on at least two occasions, but not the time he said it to me. My dad didn’t explain any further, but then went on to talk about an uncle he had in Bamber Bridge we’d never previously heard of.

Now, if there’s a neet boggart, are there day boggarts as well?

Norman Darwen
Bolton, Lancashire

PECULIAR POSTCARDS



JAN BONDESON shares another deltiological discovery from his prodigious collection of postcards. This month's pictorial blast from the past records the short but titillating career of the levitating Nita and her Svengali, Signor Martini

28. THE HYPNOTISED AND SUSPENDED LADY

Not the least curious of my Edwardian show business postcards are a set of four depicting "Nita, the Hypnotised and Suspended Lady". In her act, said to have never before been seen on the English stage, Nita was hypnotised by her manager Signor Martini as she lay inside a large wooden box on the stage; after some magical gestures were made, he called out "Nita, ascend!" and she seemed to levitate out of the box. The coffin-like box was then removed, with Nita still suspended in mid-air; a hoop was passed around her to show that this was genuine magic and hypnotism, and not some mountebank's trick.

Nita made her debut in Portsmouth in February 1905, before moving on to Bristol and Guildford. When she appeared in Stroud, she was advertised as "Mdlle Nita, the Hypnotised and Suspended Maiden, The Only Act of its kind in England, As shown before our King." After appearing in Salisbury in July and August 1905, Nita and Martini appear to have taken a break for a while, before arriving in Southampton with Studt's Winter Carnival in February 1906. One of the shows was described in the *Southern Daily Echo*: "Nita, the Hypnotised and Suspended Maiden, is without doubt one of the finest illusions we have seen for some time. In distinction to other illusions, the stage lights are left on full, and no stage draperies are used. The lady is introduced on the stage by Professor Martin, who hypnotises her and puts her in an open box (which has previously been shown to the audience). At the will of the professor she rises out of the box and floats about. The box is next removed, and the lady is



soon suspended in mid-air. The professor next passes a solid steel hoop over and around the lady to demonstrate there are no wires or springs attached to the lady's body. The box is next replaced, and Nita descends into it again. The illusion completely mystified last night's audience, and many were the questions put 'How is it done?'"

Then it was the turn of the *Lowestoft Journal* to describe one of Nita's performances at the Trades Exhibition: "Lovers of mystery will find a very entrancing entertainment in the illusion entitled 'Nita, the Hypnotised and Suspended Lady'. Nita, a young girl, is introduced on the stage, on which is a long box. The manager

makes passes. She assumes a rigid attitude, and is then placed in the box by two attendants. More passes are made, and at the word of command 'Nita, ascend!' the lady slowly rises into the air, where she remains suspended for a brief period. A hoop and walking stick are passed over and around, and the lady slowly descends. It is indeed a very clever illusion." Nita went on to Great Yarmouth, Cheltenham and Bournemouth, before ending her show business career at the Jubilee Hall in Weymouth in February 1907.

None of my four postcards of Nita has been posted, but from the newspaper coverage of her performances, it is clear that she toured southern England

LEFT: Postcards showing Nita levitating. In the first, Martini performs some magical gestures, while in the second, two female assistants stand ready.

with various travelling shows between 1905 and 1907. The idea of a young lady being hypnotised and having her conscious but immobile body manipulated by a man was a titillating one in Edwardian times, and as a consequence Nita had a good deal of success, although she never made it to London where the big money was.

So, how was the illusion done? An unbeliever in magic and levitation immediately suspects that some kind of support, built into the bottom of the coffin, was used to elevate Nita, through the two female assistants operating one or two rods inserted into the side of the wooden support. With these rods on a fulcrum and weighted, the stage assistants could use them to raise and lower Nita at Martini's command. It raises suspicion that, on the postcards, Nita's flowing robes hang down in front of her recumbent body to hide what is underneath it, and that her feet are crossed as if she is balancing on some kind of a support. Passing the hoop over and around the 'suspended' Nita is likely to have been a clever sleight of hand, Martini switching it from one hand to another so that it never travels through the area in the back where the rod or rods are inserted into the support. Thus rationalism prevails: the illusion of the Hypnotised and Suspended Lady was just a clever conjuring trick, the like of which is still being performed today, as that foratean authority Mr Gordon Rutter assures us.

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FORTEAN TIMES is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of dogmatic scientific explanations, observing that some scientists tended to argue according to their personal beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity in which everything is in an

intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox. **FT** toes no party line.

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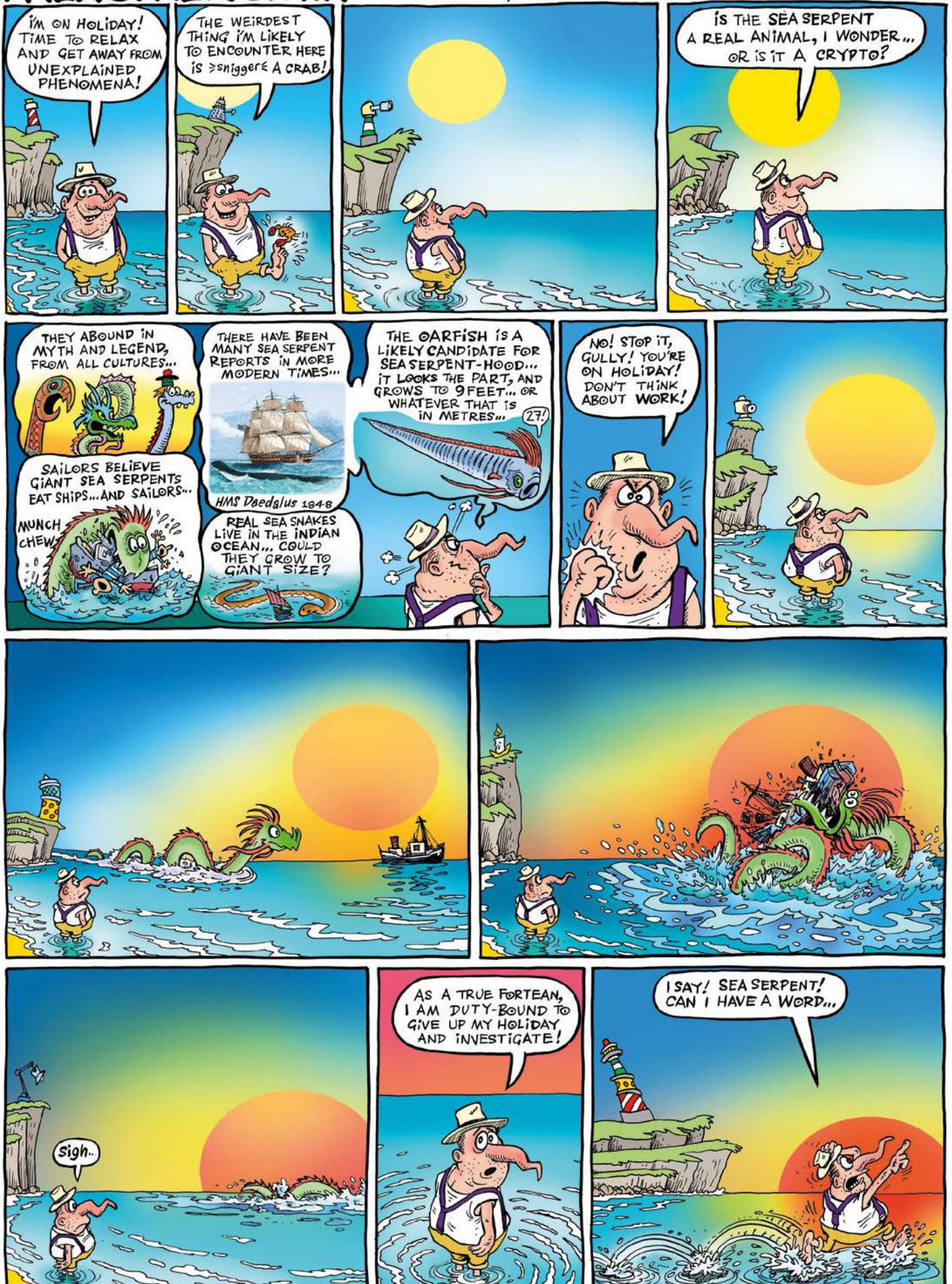
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STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

When firefighters investigating a house fire in Marathon County, Wisconsin, found the bodies of Tanya Rodriguez, 44, and James Carolfi, 52, in the garage, they immediately suspected foul play and called in police who opened a homicide investigation. Once the pathologists had conducted autopsies on the bodies, though, a radically different solution to both the fire and the couple's deaths came to light. "Foul play has been ruled out and the deaths are found to be accidental in nature and believed to be caused by electrocution from fractal wood burning," said Chief Deputy Chad Billeb. Fractal woodburning is a craft that has become a social media phenomenon, with instructional videos on YouTube and TikTok attracting millions of views. It involves creating intricate designs resembling trees, lightning bolts or ferns on pieces of wood using high-voltage electricity. Known as Lichtenberg figures, these patterns are also frequently seen on the skin of people who have been struck by lightning. To make them, crafters cover wood in a solution of baking soda, then connect it to a power source with jumper cables. These power sources are usually scavenged from microwaves or involve modified car batteries. This is often done by amateurs with little experience of high-voltage safety precautions, and as a result at least 33 people have died in fractal woodburning accidents since 2016, some of them experienced electricians. A spokesperson for the American Association of Woodturners said: "It only takes one small mistake, and you are dead; not injured, dead." Deputy Billeb concluded: "It's very pretty, quite frankly, but it should only be done by professionals." *msn.com, 26 Apr 2021.*

Police responding to reports of a "suspicious wooden box" in Linn County Cemetery in Harrisburg, Oregon, were mystified to discover a home-made casket abandoned behind a tree. On opening it, they found the body of a man described as "a white man between 30 and 60 years old, 5-ft 10-in tall, weighing 350lb, with brown and gray hair, and wearing a size 10.5 shoes". The body had no signs of trauma on it and lacked any form of identification. Cemetery staff said that there were no scheduled burials and could not explain how the casket got there. Police appealed for

anyone who could identify the dead man to come forward, while the state medical examiner was trying to determine his cause of death. *katu.com, 5 Apr 2022.*

Two Californian brothers competing in a cycle race were killed by a 47-year-old woman whose car swerved into them in Washington City, Utah. The woman then continued driving for several hundred yards because she "could not get her vehicle to stop". Arrested by city police on suspicion of homicide involving criminal negligence with an automobile, driving under the influence, leaving the scene of a deadly accident, reckless driving and improper lane travel, she explained that she was on medication for several illnesses, including irritable bowel syndrome, and had lost control of her vehicle when she began to "uncontrollably defecate on herself" at the wheel. *sacbee.com, 10 Apr 2022.*

In September 2020, Nathan Davies, 35, died when he lost control of his Yamaha motorbike while doing 60mph (97km/h) in a 30mph (48km/h) zone on Streatham High Road in Norbury, south London, and slammed into a bus shelter. Davis was thrown 25m (82ft) onto the opposite pavement and died in hospital 12 hours later from multiple injuries. Witnesses described him driving in a dangerous and erratic manner before the accident. Police said that there were "no contaminants, no obstructions, no conditions that would have affected the collision" on the road and added that there were no issues with the bike; Davis was wearing all the correct gear, had not been drinking or using any drugs and no one else was involved in the incident. Eight years earlier, in December 2012, Davies had lost control of the Audi he was driving and crashed into the same bus shelter. Then, he seriously injured a 51-year-old man and killed Veronica Chango-Alvarez, 31, who was waiting at the bus stop, which was outside her family home. Davis fled the scene and had to be tracked down by police. He was later given a sentence of five years and four months for Chango-Alvarez's death, which her family condemned as "ridiculous". Coroner Sarah Valentine recorded that Davies had died in a road traffic collision and emphasised that this was "not linked" to the 2012 collision. *dailymail.co.uk, 27 May 2022.*



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